University of Alberta

Breaking Barriers: Using Theatre with Teenage Audiences to Communicate about Sex, Drugs and Violence

by

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ABSTRACT

Using theatre to communicate with adolescents about difficult subjects such as substance abuse, sexuality/sex education and physical abuse has grown in popularity in recent decades, but few studies have explored how and why theatre for young audiences works in this context. This paper will use audience reception theory as a departure point for the analysis of three play scripts within the context of performance: *Wrecked!* by Chris Craddock, *Are We There Yet?* by Jane Heather and *The Tale of Teeka* by Michel Marc Bouchard. Focusing on the use of identification, the incorporation of blanks (as defined by Wolfgang Iser) in participatory techniques, and the development of image and metaphor, I will examine how playwrights can break through the social barriers that exist in a teenage audience and encourage engagement and communication.

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INTRODUCTION

"The theatre can never cause a social change. It can articulate the pressures towards one, help people to celebrate their strengths and maybe build their self-confidence. It can be a public emblem of inner, and outer, events, and occasionally a reminder, an elbow-jogger, a perspective bringer. Above all, it can be the way people can find their voice, their solidarity and their collective determination." (McGrath xxvii)

The concept of using theatre for moral instruction is by no means new. Its roots date back to the ancient Greeks, and throughout the development of Western society this concept has remained prevalent, generating some of the most vigorous debates in theatre history. However, it is only during the past century that the possibility of using theatre as a direct tool of communication and liberation for marginalized social groups has been considered. Bertolt Brecht's encouragement of reflexive thinking, Augusto Boal's push for liberating techniques and the Theatre In Education movement in Britain are diverse examples of the phenomena of using theatre as a method of encouraging critical thinking and successful communication. Today, there is much social-action theatre being done all over the world, but one main barrier to its further development is a lack of understanding about how and why it works. One specific area that desperately needs more analysis and understanding is Theatre for Young Audiences, especially theatre that attempts to communicate with adolescents. The teenage years are a time of extreme change and transition, and educators and parents are constantly searching for ways to mitigate the risk-taking that often occurs during these years. Theatre can be a very effective tool for this purpose; its ability to communicate in a unique way opens up dialogue and offers the teenagers a voice where they often feel they have none. I will look at why theatre can be

such an effective tool for communication and liberation, approaching this question from an audience reception theoretical perspective. My focus will be on the various techniques playwrights can use to break through the social constraints which inhibit a teenage audience and therefore prevent them from engaging with and learning from a performance. I will begin with a general examination of the benefits of theatre before moving into a deeper analysis of several of the ways playwrights can circumvent the barriers adolescents raise. The techniques I will examine include identification, which I will apply to Chris Craddock's *Wrecked!* in Chapter Two; a dialectic approach as seen through Iser's theory of blanks and gaps, which I will connect to *Are We There Yet?*, by Jane Heather, in Chapter Three; and the use of images and metaphor as seen in Michel Marc Bouchard's *The Tale of Teeka*, translated by Linda Gaboriau, in Chapter Four. While my focus will be on the scripts themselves, my analysis will be informed by an understanding of the plays as they are intended to be performed. Karen Vanhaesebrouck describes this process from a narratology point of view:

> the narratologist then operates on the level of the intended performance, his (*sic*) analysis being a 'performance-oriented textual analysis, a stage-centred reading' [. . .] studying the drama text as a text but also taking into account the potential performative elements within the textual structure. (par. 4)

Thus, while examining the techniques used in the scripts, I will analyse them from the perspective of their performative nature and the potential/probable/proven audience response. This will allow me to show how these particular scripts, when performed for teenagers, can engage them and connect with them, which will lead to a greater potential for learning and communication.

CHAPTER ONE: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Benefits of Theatre

"It is through imagination, the realm of pure possibility, that we freely make ourselves to be who or what we are, that we creatively and imaginatively become who we are, while in the process preserving the freedom and possibility to be yet otherwise than what we have become and merely are." (Greene 38)

Many educators will ask, why use theatre? It can be expensive, time-consuming, difficult to organize, and challenging to evaluate. However, the benefits that it can provide outweigh the pragmatic difficulties. There are many varied ways of how and why theatre can offer a unique and effective method of communication.

Sociologist Victor Turner has studied the theatrical event, and concluded that "to look at itself a society must cut out a piece of itself for inspection. To do this it must set up a frame within which images and symbols of what has been sectioned off can be scrutinized, assessed, and, if need be, remodelled and rearranged" (35). Turner deftly describes precisely what theatre can offer. By performing relevant theatre for teenagers, the teens can see, reflected onstage, representations of themselves. This mirroring can then provide a learning opportunity as they gain insight into their interactions, choices and relationships, and learn about the possible alternatives to difficult decisions. Their lives have been 'set up in a frame', within which they have the power to criticize, analyse and make changes to their choices and behaviour. Martin Esslin also identifies the importance of this frame:

It is first of all a frame for reality which insists on the spectator concentrating on

> it as a venue for significant sights and events; and it can concentrate reality in space and time; and in doing so, it converts the real into a signifier for itself and beyond itself, pointing into areas of meaning transcending itself. It is the tension between these basic significations and the multiple layers of transcending, derivative, secondary, and tertiary meta-significations that creates the power, the emotional impact and the magic of the dramatic symbol. (10)

Both Esslin and Turner acknowledge that by presenting an issue onstage, it gains both additional significance and an increased potential for criticism. The stage can allow the audience to reflect upon and critique important concepts in their lives, showing them greater possibilities than they had known existed.

This concept of highlighting alternatives is explored by Maxine Greene in her book *Releasing the Imagination*. She examines how imagination can be an emancipatory force, make empathy possible and enable us understand the 'other' by "allowing us to break with the taken for granted, to set aside familiar distinctions and definitions" (3). She says that the arts can provide new perspectives and that meaningful works of art can "often lead to a startling defamiliarization of the ordinary" (4). Drawing much inspiration from Brecht's theories of alienation and self-reflexivity, Greene emphasizes how imagination allows us to see alternatives, to understand how things could be otherwise, and to journey beyond our usual realm and break through what "appears impervious to protest and discontent" (19).

The benefits and possibility inherent in showing alternatives is also echoed in the adolescent development psychology of Erik Erikson, a German psychologist from the early twentieth century. He developed theories of identity acquisition that were based on

Freud's work, but focussed more on the ego and the social influences surrounding a person. He breaks a person's life span down into eight stages, beginning in infancy and ending with maturity. Stage Five is "Puberty and Adolescence" and is perhaps Erikson's most complex and well-developed stage. He states that the key function of adolescence is finding an identity, termed the "identity crisis". In Erikson's model, this phrase refers to the problem teenagers encounter when attempting to enter society as an adult. Before they can accomplish this, they must develop their beliefs, ideals and attitudes, and eventually resolve these explorations into a relatively stable system, otherwise known as an identity. In order to discover this identity, teens will experiment by taking on different roles. This is often reflected in clothing choices and fickle friendships, but can run deeper and have more serious effects on their lifestyle choices (i.e. attitudes towards drinking, drugs, sex, violence). The concept that one of teenagers' primary goals is to discover their own identity is significant for playwrights writing for young people, since these artists have the opportunity to portray various types of characters (i.e. roles which the teenagers can take on). This could open up the possibility that teens, through watching a play, could vicariously experience different roles without having to actively take them on, thus sparing them dangerous or long-term effects of playing out these roles in the real world (see Lerner *Life-Span* 337-340).

Christine Redington also addresses this issue of role-play. In her monograph, *Can Theatre Teach?*, Redington explores the development and evaluation of the Theatre in Education movement in Britain. In essence, TIE involves groups of actor-teachers who develop theatre programs about certain subjects which they then perform/conduct in schools. TIE can cover a range of subjects including health, art, economics, history,

geography and sociology. In an extensive exploration of one TIE research project, Redington found that

> the role becomes a way to learn, a way of giving the pupils a freedom to express themselves. Rather like the putting on of a mask it places between the pupil and the events a disguise, something to hide behind rather than something which requires the creation of a new identity. (178)

Redington is describing how theatre can allow teenagers to try on different identities and experience different situations without having to actually go through them and possibly suffer the consequences. It also highlights the usefulness of giving the teens a third character through which to speak; then, their questions are not about themselves but about another, allowing them to bring up issues that they might otherwise be too shy to raise.

In addition to allowing the students to try on various characteristics and safely role-play in the guise of a character from the play, theatre can provide some unique opportunities for communication. Certain inherent characteristics of drama can open up discussion about topics that are often sensitive and difficult for adults and teenagers. Maxine Greene suggests that the arts live in the margins, away from the "conformist, the respectable, the moralistic, and the constrained" (28); if this is true, then it may help explain why using theatre (as an art form) can be so successful as a means for discussing difficult topics. It allows students to free themselves from the value-based expectations and rules imposed by a parental order and can open up dialogue in a liminal space. This outside space allows them to express opinions, ask questions and demand answers that might normally be shut down, pushed aside, and ignored because of discomfort or denial

on the part of the adults involved. Greene quotes Herbert Marcuse as saying that art

> breaks open a dimension inaccessible to other experience, a dimension in which human beings, nature and things no longer stand under the law of the established reality principle.... The encounter with the truth of art happens in the estranging language and images which make perceptible, visible, and audible that which is no longer, or not yet, perceived, said and heard in everyday life. (30)

As Marcuse insinuates, theatre operates in a realm in which ordinary norms of society can be redefined and re-evaluated, allowing for a greater freedom of discussion. Thus, theatre can provide an arena in which difficult topics can be discussed because the general unspoken rules about what is appropriate conversation can be discarded and teenagers can feel free to express themselves fully. Another way in which this open communication can be enhanced by theatre is connected to the fact that the teenagers are encouraged to relate to the actors, most of whom would be relative strangers, and this makes it easier for the teens to be open and honest. For instance, Redington describes how an outside group was able to deal with a difficult subject (in this case, racism) more readily than the teachers themselves:

> Without doubt, the presence of an outside troupe dealing with such a delicate topic made it easier to deal with internally. It was noticeable that colleagues who had expressed considerable reservations in the beginning were pleased and encouraged by the response they had from pupils [. . .] It is a most valuable function of a TIE team's work to provide the external stimulus for work in this area since, through their skills as teachers as well as actors, they can create a perspective which the staff of a school can go on to develop. (192)

While teenagers may be embarrassed to ask certain questions of their teachers, actors who come in for only a day are more anonymous and may be seen as less judgemental. Redington goes on to describe the unique impact theatre can have:

> Theatre in Education has produced a very distinct way of working, a method of communicating ideas to a particular audience in a form that is relevant, understandable, yet exciting and often provocative [. . .] Teams are able to introduce themes and methods into a school which a teacher would find it hard to do as an individual. In its ability to motivate pupils to learn, and concentrate, and produce stimulus on many different levels, TIE offers something that the education system appears to destroy. (211)

Her mention of the TIE teams being able to introduce ideas which a teacher might find difficult emphasizes the fact that having a theatre group broach these topics can have a positive impact on the students' learning.

One final way in which theatre can provide an unconventional approach to learning has to do with the active aspect of it, the learning by doing. In Redington's book, the students themselves describe the value of the theatrical experience. They consistently refer to the fact that having the experience, actually being involved in the piece, allowed them to learn much more than if they had just had a series of lessons about it (192-3). In a theatre performance, the students are more involved in "doing" something than if they are sitting through a normal class, and this learning-by-doing plays an important role in what theatre can achieve. Anne Ubersfeld echoes this in her discussion on the nature of experiencing pleasure in the theatre, saying that "theatrical pleasures are rarely passive; 'doing' plays a larger role than 'receiving'" ("Pleasure" 132). As Redington adds,

"Increased student motivation, stemming from heightened interest in the teaching and learning process, is a commonly reported phenomenon following simulation exercises [in the classroom]" (185).

Theatre possesses several unique characteristics which allow it to be an effective medium for encouraging discussion and learning. First of all, there is the opportunity for identity exploration through the presentation of alternatives, role-play and watching oneself represented onstage. Secondly, because theatre exists outside the boundaries of everyday life, it allows for discussion of possibly taboo subjects. Finally, theatre offers the opportunity to bring in a trusted group of outsiders to begin discussion on sensitive topics, and also allows the possibility of active learning.

Breaking Social Constraints

Thus far, I have been highlighting theatre's general qualities that coincidently make it an excellent medium for encouraging communication. From here, we must journey into the specific ways that playwrights can manipulate theatre in order to engage their audiences. Since theatre can only function as an effective means of communication if the audience agrees to allow this process to unfold, we must look beyond the mere existence of beneficial qualities and attempt to decipher exactly what is at work that engages the spectator. Good intentions and theoretical consequences are an important beginning for creating beneficial theatre for young people, but they are just that: only a beginning. Without delving into why the students are reacting to the performance, how they are reacting, what they are perceiving, what they are responding to and why, we would be left with a huge gap in our knowledge of how and why theatre can function as a tool of communication. Audience reception theory is a crucial, yet understudied, way of examining why and how theatre can provoke and develop discussion about sensitive topics with teenagers. There are several aspects of audience reception theory which are especially relevant for theatre for adolescents; one component is receptive strategies, as Susan Bennett terms them in her seminal monograph *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception*, such as identification or using a dialectic approach, and the breaking of social constraints.

Receptive strategies are a key initial element that must be present in any production, not only for adolescents but for all performance. Bennett is referring to the ways in which a playwright (for example) draws the audience into her play and convinces

them to pay attention and engage with the story; in other words, what makes an audience member buy into the show.

There are many elements which contribute to the engagement of the students. However, in order for these receptive strategies to work, playwrights must first break through the many socially constructed barriers that develop when adolescents watch a performance. This is a general phenomenon: for audiences of all ages, there are strong socially-motivated factors influencing their reception and perception of a performance. In general, most spectators' reactions will be edited according to those around them. For this reason, many semiotic researchers have found it difficult to isolate the individual spectator. Anne Ubersfeld discusses how it is rare to find a spectator who will go against the mainstream reaction, and Keir Elam remarks that "there is a tendency towards integration, the surrendering of the individual to the group for the duration of the performance" (Bennett 71). Jon Whitmore addresses this as well, claiming that the social relationship "can detract from the spectator's ability to concentrate on the performance itself. A break in concentration caused by a dominating social agenda can strain a spectator's concentration and affect her ability to read signifiers" (54). As Bennett quotes Elam as saying, theatre often engenders a "homogeneity of responses" (153). Bennett also asserts that "in almost all cases laughter, derision, and applause is infectious" (153). This can become a problem if the playwright hopes to disrupt societal norms and encourage counter-readings.

This phenomenon of social cohesion must be considered by playwrights writing for teenagers, since this social group mentality is especially strong in adolescents and has an even more pronounced effect on their reception of a performance. This concept is

explored in adolescent developmental psychology, beginning with Jean Piaget's theories of the cognitive stages of development. He terms the fourth and final stage as formal operational thinking, in which a person begins to think hypothetically. This means that they can assess their own thinking, leading to what Elkind termed egocentrism in many adolescents because they are unable to distinguish between their own thoughts and what others are thinking. Elkind developed the term imaginary audience to describe the apparent phenomena of teenagers coming to believe that others are as preoccupied with their appearance and behaviour as they are themselves; thus, they construct in their mind a critical audience, either positive or negative, who are constantly scrutinizing them (Lerner *Challenges* 250-1). Although this is still a popular concept in introductory psychology texts, research has shown that this audience is not necessarily completely imaginary; teenagers are actually subjected to scrutiny and judgement by their peers (Bell 216). Thus, the commonly-held opinion that teenagers have unnecessarily high levels of self-consciousness is not necessarily true; they are actually being judged on a constant basis by those around them, and many of their main concerns centre around the opinions which others hold of them, since these opinions can have a very real and powerful impact on their life. However, whether considered real or imaginary, research does show that teenagers tend to be more preoccupied with what others think of them than do either younger or older people (Bell 216). This indicates that the pressure to react to a certain performance in the same manner as those around them will be stronger in adolescents than in a more adult population because of the combination of their increased self-consciousness and the general phenomenon of a homogenous response from the theatre audience.

In his empirical research conducted on the nature of audience reaction, Frank Coppieters formed four general conclusions about how the audience perceives a performance:

1) One's attitude toward/perception of/relationship with the rest of the public is an important factor in one's theatrical experience.
2) Perceptual processes in the theatre are, among other things, a form of social interaction.
3) Inanimate objects can become personified and/or receive such strongly symbolic loadings that any anxiety about their fate becomes a crux in people's emotional experience.
4) 'Environmental' theatre goes against people experiencing homogeneous group reactions. (Coppieters cited in Bennett 91)

Some of these points highlight what has been mentioned above, and others imply possible strategies for breaking though the social constraints of the audience. I have already mentioned the first and second, but they are powerful here because they are the result of an empirical research study, rather than theoretical speculation, and show yet again just how crucial an understanding of teenagers' social group dynamics is when creating theatre for them. Whitmore, approaching this concept from a semiotic point of view, observes that "when spectators come together they constitute a sign system for both performers and other audience members. That is, each spectator serves as a signifier for performers and other spectators to read" (56). Coppietiers third point helps show why symbolism and metaphor can be such powerful tools in creating young people's theatre; I will explore this further in my discussion on the use of images and metaphor. The fourth

discusses how performing theatre in unusual locations (ie. outside of a typical, professional theatre) can help to resist a socially-cohesive reaction. This usually happens because the implied expectations and traditions of going to the theatre have been circumvented by the unusual surroundings and the normal sign systems which influence the audience's reaction have been removed, leaving them free to interpret the performance in any way they please. This occurrence suggests why going into schools to perform, rather than bringing the teenagers to a traditional theatre, can, in some cases, be more effective in getting them to think critically and engage with the material. This leads into my next discussion on methods of intervening in teens' social relationships.

It is crucial to examine how playwrights attempt to break this group mentality. There are various methods and theoretical approaches which exist that can disrupt the connection between a teen and her social group. As I delineated in my introduction, the three main techniques which I will examine are identification, dialectics and imagery. However, there are other factors which can also contribute to this rupture. Expanding on Coppieters' point that environmental theatre can prevent or at least mitigate these homogenous reactions, Bennett explores various aspects of theatre architecture, spaces, seating and anything else encountered by the audience after their arrival at the theatre but before the beginning of the performance. She mentions that the seating arrangement and the number of spectators allowed will have a strong influence on audience members' reception of a performance (131). While her discussion of theatre spaces ostensibly contradicts the findings of the semiologists above, we can find an explanation for this in the purpose behind the choices made. Bennett discusses how traditional auditoriums emphasize personal perceptions rather than cohesive social response, keeping the

individuality of the spectator clearly defined. Non-traditional, contemporary theatre, on the other hand, often tries to break down these individualist barriers, and encourage a social perception (Bennett 133). However, the cohesive social response to which Bennett refers is not the same as the one we have been speaking about; thus, our lack of appropriate language becomes inhibitory. My use of cohesive social response refers to the often detrimental unwillingness or inability of audiences to react differently from those around them; the cohesive social response with which Bennett is dealing is meant to describe a beneficial increase in social consciousness and awareness on the part of the audience of their social contracts and connections with the others around them. Bennett's usage has a different agenda in that it includes the attempt on the part of the playwright to break the audience out of their comfortable individuality and force them to confront the fact that their lives are inextricably tied to those around them.

When Bennett states that non-traditional (environmental) theatre tries to break down individual barriers and encourage a social perception, she is actually arguing for the same destruction of social constraints as I am, despite our opposing terminology. She speaks of the need to tear down barriers between the spectators so that they can truly see those around them and think critically and self-reflexively; I argue for the necessity of breaking down those social barriers which keep spectators from criticizing and reacting as individuals, rather than just following the crowd. Once these social constraints are broken or diminished, the spectator is free to react in new and self-reflexive ways, and this can then lead to the social response that Bennett desires. Contemporary French director Ariane Mnouchkine often attempts this, allowing the audience to see the actors preparing for the show. She believes that this transparency is important for setting up the

desired relationship with the audience, one where the spectator will feel free to participate (Whitmore 59). Thus, by being performed in unusual spaces, plays can resist a uniform and traditional interpretation to encourage innovatory and disruptive readings. This allows adolescents an opportunity to question and discuss ideas which are often downplayed or forbidden in the normal scholastic environment; the liminal space created by performing theatre in classrooms or school cafeterias opens up many possibilities for communication which are usually denied to students. They are encouraged to think critically about their social roles and their relationships with others.

Receptive Strategies

The ability and desire of teens to take part in a performance is an important factor in their ability to learn from and communicate about a play and the issues which it presents. A playwright's greatest challenge, therefore, involves transcending the social barriers to receptive strategies and engaging the adolescents. The playwrights must encourage each teen to actively choose to participate in the show. In *Theatre Audiences*, Karen Gaylord describes the role a spectator must take on in order to experience the theatrical event:

> The spectator serves as a psychological participant and empathetic collaborator in the maintenance and 'truth' of the fictive world onstage, is 'taken out of himself' (sic) and becomes for the time part of an ad hoc collective consciousness, ready to find meaning and significance in the events taking place on stage. (Bennett 139)

In order to experience a theatrical event, the spectator must accept certain conventions and take an active role in constructing meaning out of the performance. This can sometimes pose a problem with teenage audiences if they chose not to participate as spectators in the theatrical event. It is then important for the playwright and director to have techniques in place to draw the students into the performance and convince them that it is worth buying in. This will be a prominent point of my analysis of *Wrecked!*, *Are We There Yet?* and *The Tale of Teeka*, since without this acceptance of the performance from the outset, the resulting scepticism and boredom will prove disastrous to the performance. It is essential that the play appeal directly and immediately to the teenage audience, and have several ways developed to engage them. The three methods which I

will examine are identification, the use of dialectics and blanks, and imagery and metaphor.

While examining these methods, I will draw on my own personal experience as well as the evidence from theorists and practitioners in the field since I have been working with teenagers for years in various capacities. I worked as a peer mentor and teacher in my high school, which gave me an opportunity to observe and interpret teenage behaviour while still one myself. Often on the outside of social groups, I was allowed an objective and analytical view of my peers' behaviour. I then worked with young teenagers in theatre and was given first-hand experience in the social dynamics of their peer group and in how theatre could break through these constraints. Intimate exposure to my younger siblings' peer groups also added to my knowledge of teenage behaviour and expectations. Therefore, my analysis and conclusions are often informed by my personal interpretation and experiences. Although I do use empirical studies whenever possible to substantiate my claims about teenage behaviour, opinions and concerns, there are times when this is not possible, and I have then relied on my own personal impressions. Many of the conclusions I reach were arrived at using a mixture of personal knowledge and experience, empirical research and theoretical speculation, and were greatly informed by the general reading I completed, as evidenced in my bibliography. One of the limitations of my methodology is a general lack of direct response from the teenagers themselves to the plays which I am analysing; I acknowledge this, but to have attempted direct audience response research would have been far beyond the scope of this thesis.

Identification

"To reforge the links, the chain of a rhythm when audiences saw their own real lives in a show, we must allow audiences to identify with the show breath by breath and beat by beat." (Artaud 95)

Identification is one of the most effective receptive strategies a playwright can utilise. If the audience members cannot identify with the characters/actors onstage they will be unlikely to engage with the material. There are many ways to invite identification, some of which are especially pertinent to teenage audiences. One debate that has arisen is whether simple realism or a more interpretive, expressionistic approach will encourage identification. There are strong arguments for both sides, and in the end the answer may be a combination of the two. Bennett uses Brecht's theories to make the intriguing point that simple realism onstage cannot lead to the kind of self-reflexive practices necessary to effect social change because the audience "can only learn/ask questions about that particular situation, and does not explore any relationship between this slice of life and its own social reality" (23). However, like other demographics, teenagers often tend to relate the best to characters in whom they see elements of themselves, characters who are just like them.

Perhaps what is most important to identification, rather than exact replicas of typical teenagers, is an understanding on the part of the playwright of the teens' socio-cultural background. As Bennett suggests, the degree to which audiences accept a theatre practitioner's proposed receptive strategies depends on some "shared socio-cultural background between text and audience, director and audience, production company and

audience" (142). Without a clear perception of the world which adolescents inhabit, playwrights will be unable to connect with them and thus engage them in the work. Whitmore also acknowledges this, mentioning that "the only way a director can hope to send a clear message is to know the audience (its size, socioeconomic background, age range, religion, etc.) and to understand the variables in the dimensions of theatrical communication" (55). This is a crucial point when working with young audiences. Without a strong knowledge of teenage culture, attitudes, speech patterns, trends, etc., a playwright can easily alienate a young audience with outdated or inappropriate cultural references and an all too transparent attempt to talk like a young person. This shared background, whether natural or cultivated by the playwright, is often what makes the difference between a successful play and one which does not resonate with teenagers. This position is substantiated by Theatre In Education (TIE) playwright Jim Mirrione. As he says, "my experience has taught me that a TIE play written in a vacuum, without any close observation or knowledge of the argot, conflicts, codes and concerns of young people living in contemporary society will undoubtedly fail" (77). The concerns of TIE playwrights are quite similar to those writing general theatre for young people, and thus Mirrione's experience is extremely relevant for any playwright focussing on the youth demographic.

One aspect of a shared socio-cultural background that is important for a playwright to understand is the type of issues and concerns relevant for adolescents in contemporary society. As Mirrione puts it,

> The writer must also be willing to question the social, political and curricular issues that affect youth and society in general [. . .] the TIE playwright benefits

> from being a keen observer of the educational trends, societal developments and political issues affecting the community, city, state and country. (77-8)

This intimate knowledge of the reality of teens' lives is crucial to the creation of incisive, relevant theatre for adolescents; many adults believe they know what teens are concerned about, but a closer look at the issue will often reveal a disconnect between what adults are trying to teach teens and what teens actually need/want to know. Research into policy making for adolescent development has identified some key concerns for youth-focused playwrights. Focusing on positive youth development (highlighting intervention strategies that promote normal, that is average or positive, development rather than deter abnormal or negative development), psychology researchers have found that

> interventions that are not devised in light of a group's characteristics of individuality [. . .] are not likely to promote such development [. . .] all policies and programs, all interventions, must be tailored to the specific target population and, in particular, to a group's developmental and environmental circumstances. (Lerner *Challenges* 417)

This supports the previous theoretical and anecdotal discussion that playwrights must be closely connected with the culture of the teens for whom they are writing. If they do not understand the adolescents' attitudes and opinions, they will be unlikely to connect with them.

Researcher Joanna Bell explains that "caregivers and other professionals may be more effective if they can understand the 'world of what matters' from young people's point of view" (210). Her study looks at what really matters to youth in an attempt to separate what adults think teens think about, and what they actually dwell on. She

identifies the following as core areas of adolescent concern: image/appearance, friends, bullying, what other people think, family, relationships and sex, physical health, future, exams, money and drugs (212). One interesting result of her investigation is the discovery that teenagers are often more worried about how other people's opinions of them will change if they are caught drinking/smoking/doing drugs/having sex/getting pregnant rather than about negative health consequences or life-changing situations (214-5). Adults often construct programs that focus on, for example, the dangers of drinking or having promiscuous sex; Bell's research shows that those sorts of programs may be ineffective because they are not addressing the real concerns of the teenagers. Most teens already objectively know the possible results of their actions; what they worry about is how others will view them if they are caught participating in something not approved of by others. This poses an important question for playwrights: for whom are they writing? Are they writing to please the authority figures, or the teenagers? If they are writing for the teenagers, then they must tailor their message to what concerns the teens the most. If the social consequences of these risk-taking choices are more relevant to them, then the playwrights should be focussing on that aspect, rather than providing already-taught information about health consequences. By so doing, the playwright can more easily invite identification between the teenagers and the play, since the teens will feel that the playwright is speaking directly and honestly to them rather than catering to their parents or teachers. This display of understanding and respect can help break through the scepticism and reluctance to be helped that exists in teen culture.

One of the other major factors in fostering a shared socio-cultural background is the use of language; this is a key element in connecting with any audience. If the

language of the text is too far beyond the reality of the audience, it will be more difficult for audience members to feel a relationship with the characters on stage. This is not to say that adolescents cannot connect emotionally with, for instance, Shakespearian characters; however, there is a greater chance of losing the interest of the youth and alienating them from the performance if they feel that they cannot understand the language onstage. Thus, for a playwright with the specific intention of promoting discussion about difficult subjects, language which reflects the reality of adolescents' lives will be a more effective receptive strategy than language which is embellished or overly poetic. Jim Mirrione talks about the use of contemporary language in a text, saying that a playwright for young people must be able to utilize the

> idiomatic expressions, slang, connotations, phrases and other contemporary jargon culled from media, culture and students themselves. All of the above can serve to ground the play in realistic terms, and there is an immediate identification on the part of the student when this type of language is used during the course of dramatic action. (84)

He gives an example where this was successfully done, and describes how the students reacted as if "someone had broken a code and spoken to them about the things they knew. This reaction can immediately ease tension student audiences have" (85-6). This is an important element of how playwrights engender identification, and supports the theoretical idea that language is a crucial element in identification.

Closely related to language is the element of character, another significant method of inviting identification. When teens see an actor onstage portraying someone closely related to their own experience, it can often draw the teens into the action and encourage

them to make connections between the character and their own lives. Based on his observations of successful TIE theatre, Mirrione observed that the characters to which the children related the most

> constantly provoked the audience and emotionally affected them because they were seen in highly charged situations similar to their own lives. This identification with characters also allowed them to scrutinize their motivations and to see how all actions resulted in choices and consequences. (89-90)

The playwright must be well-engaged with current teen culture in order to accurately portray teenage characters, and as we have seen, this accurate portrayal of adolescent experience is extremely important for encouraging identification and thus engaging the teens in the play. In sum, Mirrione believes that a playwright can make any material dramatic for young people if it

> has relevance for the intended school audience; if it presents characters and situations that are easily identifiable and similar to the concerns of a student's world; if the language and idiomatic expressions have resonance for that audience; and if the emotional pull of the subject-matter is within the range of the audience for whom the play is intended. (79)

Mirrione summarizes the various elements in identification well. A playwright writing for young people must invite identification in order to encourage the audience to respond and engage with the material. As we have seen, one of the most important ways in which a playwright can achieve this is through an understanding and subsequent application of the teenagers' socio-cultural background. The use of characters who are similar to the students, or to people who inhabit the students' daily lives, appropriate language that

relates to how teenagers actually talk, and serious consideration about the significance of the issues for the students are all crucial elements in the process of achieving identification.

Dialectics and Iser's Theory of Blanks

> *"[Theatre can be] a dialectical and materialistic practice through which its audiences could be actively engaged as the* subjects *in the learning process (as opposed to passive objects who are filled with knowledge by and from others) but simultaneously be challenged to take a critically* objective *view of their experience." (Jackson 110)*

One subtle aspect of receptive strategies is the concept of inviting the teenagers to become active creators within the performance of the theatre piece. Bennett states that in contemporary theatre, the spectator is a "self-conscious co-creator of performance" (21), implying that the writers and directors cannot assume their own control over how a play will be received; the teenagers will draw their own conclusions, and construct their own meanings. In *Theatre Audiences*, Carl Gardner explains it in this way:

> The 'receiver' of any 'message' is never passive – here we see the false analogy with the radio-receiver – but is an active *producer* of meanings. It is precisely one of the ideological functions of the bourgeois media to obscure this. (Bennett 30; emphasis original)

Some authority figures may be uncomfortable with this concept, and attempt to manipulate the responses of their audiences. Practitioners like Erwin Piscator, a theatre director from the early twentieth century, worked with audiences by locating their exact social and political background and then incorporating this into the play in order to generate a specific response. As Bennett argues, this did not liberate audiences to think for themselves, but instead carefully controlled, if not manipulated, their reactions (25). Thus, if one applies the theories of Bertolt Brecht, practitioners working for and with

young people should not attempt to manipulate their responses, but instead should encourage them to be "participatory, but thoughtful" (27) and to question what seems natural and universal in their lives. This would hopefully lead to teenagers being able to see the possibility for change in their lives, habits and relationships.

Wolfgang Iser has explored the relationship between a reader and a text in his phenomenological analysis of reading. His interpretations, if transferred from literature to theatre, offer one explanation for how playwrights can include receptive strategies in their scripts that will engage an adolescent audience. Iser isolates three main approaches: "considerations of the text, of the reader, and, most importantly, the conditions of interaction between the two" (Bennett 43). It is this last stage concerning communication that is the most relevant for this study. Iser suggests that successful communication is achieved when the text controls the reading, and this is done through blanks and negation. "Blanks represent what is concealed in a text, the drawing-in of the reader where he or she has left to make connections" (Bennett 44). Negations cancel out a familiar idea, but in this cancellation they remain apparent, thus modifying the reader's view of what is familiar and guiding him to "adopt a position *in relation* to the text" (Iser 169; emphasis original). Blanks, however, "allow the reader to bring a story to life, to assign meaning" (Bennett 44), drawing a neat connection to Brecht's idea that the spectator is a producer of meaning, and we should be encouraging the "self-conscious co-creation" of the performance. Within my analysis, I will be looking at why my particular plays engage teenagers, and Iser's theories offer a strong theoretical line of questioning: does the play include these blanks and negations? Is there an absence, which then requires the teens to fill it with their own individual presence, thus capturing their interest? Is it in these

liminal spaces that the teens create their own meaning?

Another aspect of receptive strategies explored by David Pammenter and Jim Mirrione is the difference between a dialetic and a monologic performance. Dialectic theatre presents ideas in a subtle debate form, allowing for questioning, disagreement and conversation, whereas monologic theatre presents only one point of view, allowing no room for reflection or disunity. Pammenter begins by discussing the difference between bias and dogma. He rightly asserts that it is impossible to present any theatre or create any school program that is completely free of bias, and goes on to say that a certain degree of bias is actually beneficial. If all possible perspectives are given, then the teenager's assumptions are unlikely to be challenged, and they will have little reason to question them. Instead, Pammenter calls for bias that is responsibly handled in order to "provoke a response or exploration as part of an opening-up process" (62). He believes that "learning is a dialectical process and the true dialectic can only exist if real positions are taken" (62). On the other side is dogma, which "admits no opposites and permits no learning" (62). He calls it part of a closing-down process, leaving little room for discovery, and claims that it does little except maintain the status quo. He asserts that "educationally it is useful to challenge accepted truths and norms as part of the process of enabling the child to discover his or her own responses – it is [*sic*] to do with liberating one's understanding rather than imposing order" (63). Mirrione also mentions this concept of dialectical learning. Two of the important questions he says playwrights must ask themselves are, "Does the information seek to set up an intelligent dialectic between two opposing ideas, characters or forces, or does it espouse only one opinion throughout the play?" and "Does the dramatic material challenge the audience to rethink the political,

social and cultural issues it presents, and then allow a balanced discussion to emerge after the play?" (75). These two queries will become increasingly relevant as I proceed through my analysis of *Wrecked!, Are We There Yet?* and *The Tale of Teeka.*.

This possibility for liberating the child to self-reflect has already been mentioned in the section on encouraging teens to act as co-creators in the performance process. Following on that argument, I would assert that teens respond more to dialectical theatre than to theatre that imposes a single opinion. The element of choice, the responsibility of making their own decisions within the play, appeals to these teens who are in the process of rebelling, pushing the edges of their beliefs and questioning anything handed down to them by those in authority. By making a play dialectic rather than monologic, the playwright is offering an element of control to the teenagers and thus implying a level of respect for their intelligence and ability to discern. As Brecht asserted,

> the latter theatre [an epic/learning play] holds that the audience is a collection of individuals, capable of thinking and of reasoning, of making judgements even in the theatre; it treats it as individuals of mental and emotional maturity, and believes it wishes to be so regarded. (79)

This dialectical process opens up avenues of communication, allowing and encouraging discussion, disagreement and debate. This subtle acknowledgement of adolescents' independence and intelligence can be extremely effective in compelling them to open up and engage in the performance. If they begin to suspect that adults in positions of authority are being didactic, derogatory or patronizing, adolescents will often shut down immediately, refusing to engage in any participation. This raises one brief but important point about the importance of emotional and intellectual depth in theatrical work for

young people. As Pammenter says, "If the material presented is slight, lacking emotional or intellectual depth, then the intellectual and aesthetic capabilities of the children are being underestimated and the resulting work will be patronizing and hold little meaning for them" (69). This can be quite important for adolescent theatre, since teens are often acutely aware of their tenuous role as not-quite-adults but no-longer-children, and as such are quite attuned to anything patronizing or placating. Thus, theatre which speaks down to them, either emotionally or intellectually, is destined to fail, since the teenagers will undoubtedly pick up on this condescending tone and refuse to accept and enjoy the performance. In sum, the concept of dialectical theatre is an important tool in preventing this perception of patronization and therefore can function as a receptive strategy.

Imagery and Metaphor

"[Imagistic theatre] demonstrates the theatre's power to conjure the richness of the human experience." (Les Deux Mondes website)

One way to avoid a monologic approach is to use images, which allow the teens to interpret them in their own way, to be conscious co-creators of the meaning of the performance. This use of imagery is an important way that playwrights can avoid being didactic and engage their audience. Redington mentions the importance of theatrical images, saying that they are "a concrete stage event which has meanings embedded in the event which go beyond the event itself" (203) and that using images and symbols "provide valuable 'shorthand' about the meaning and message, preventing TIE programmes becoming heavy sermons, or agit-prop pieces. They convey the message without the need for the soap-box" (203). Using images and metaphor allows adults to approach topics with the students in such a way as not to threaten them with preaching, but to open up dialogue. Turner also discusses how communication in theatre is achieved not only through language but also through "gesture, dance, art, symbolic objects, and so on" (105). Turner isolates the important notion that theatre performances can facilitate effective communication on difficult subjects because it has unusual and varied methods of communication at its disposal.

When speaking of image and metaphor, the very definitions of these words can become a barrier to understanding. I will define them specifically for the purpose of this discussion in order to clearly differentiate between them. I will use the concept of image to refer to a visual representation of an idea (this is occasionally referred to by theorists as

dramatic symbol). Metaphor refers to a comparison between two ideas or objects in order to imply a similarity between the two, and is created within the text. I will avoid the use of the term symbol because of its extensive use in semiotics and the implied reference to indices and icons.

Metaphor and image hold immense power, and can be a profound and effective way to communicate with an audience while still allowing them the freedom to interpret the performance and create their own meaning. Contemporary Belgian dramatist, Jan Lauwers, director of Needcompany, says that within his image-based theatre, "the audience can construct its own performance. Everybody in the audience sees something different. It creates energy". Interviewer Erika Rundle replies "I responded to that energy, which to me constituted a freedom I had never experienced before in theatre" (65). This freedom to which Rundle refers exists in the ability of the spectator to construct their own meaning out of the images presented onstage. By allowing the audience to develop their own ideas about what is occurring onstage, rather than overtly displaying or verbalizing every message, the playwright gives agency to the audience. This agency, or sense of empowerment, engages the audience more intensely than if the playwright overtly explained everything to them. As Anne Ubserfeld explains, "Theatre is an art that fascinates because of the participation it requires, a participation of which neither the meaning nor the function are clear, a participation that requires analysis" (4).

One of the fundamental aspects of metaphor and imagery is that the responsibility to decode the meaning lies with the audience; rather than explicitly stating a concept, a playwright will suggest and guide, leaving the spectator to apply signification to the image or metaphor portrayed. As Colin Counsell says of Peter Brooks' work, "only the

audience's imaginative input makes the theatrical event 'complete'" (171). Thus, like with Iser's blanks, the image leaves an empty space which must be filled by the imagination of the audience. This leads to a strong engagement, since they must use their interpretative faculties in order to make meaning out of the images. Counsell elaborates on this, saying that "Minimal, partial and metaphoric images, then, engage the spectator's imaginative faculties, producing a richer *conceptual* text than could be realised literally onstage" (172). Thus, through the use of imagery, a playwright can interpellate the spectator as an active co-creator in the performance.

The power of an image lies in its communicative potential; as Martin Esslin writes, a "dramatic symbol" denotes

> a secondary as distinct from a primary meaning, an overtone of meaning by which a given sign or image can carry a deeper, or higher, or more recondite charge of significance than the sign or object or image in question could ordinarily carry, a meaning more charged with emotion or insight than the primary significance could accommodate and by which the mundane, prosaic word or object or image becomes transmuted into something poetic and sublime. (2)

This inference that an image can carry greater or deeper meaning than its obvious primary one is echoed in Michael Anderson's comment:

> Like all critical terms the word "image" lacks scientific precision, but what can be said about an image is that it is always greater than the sum of its parts. It takes its force from the juxtaposition of one idea with another, particular with general [. . .] Within such an image, language, whether presented naturalistically or not, is so to speak a part of the picture. (148)

Given that the use of an image can suggest meaning on more levels than just the immediately obvious, it reveals its potential as a communicative tool. Because of this significance-enhancing ability, a playwright can use images to her advantage in order to communicate about topics or issues that may normally be too sensitive, controversial or disturbing to discuss using literal language.

Therefore, by using image and metaphor in a play, the playwright can use a visual language in order to say much more than would be possible with verbalized, literal language. The layers of meaning which can be embodied in an image or metaphor enable a playwright to suggest several things in an instant, creating a unique method of communication. David Ball describes how an image "expresses a collection, a combination of multiple, simultaneous elements that together express fullness and totality. This is a less precise but more evocative communication" (68). As Esslin also believes, images are valuable because of their greater capacity for intricacy: "This greater complexity allows more profound insights to be communicated in areas of human experience that are multilayered, delicate and beyond the reach of discursive speech" (2). Marion Woodman refers to this in her interpretation of Jung's explanation of metaphor. From Jung's perspective,

> Metaphor affects the person on three levels: the mental level on which we interpret meaning, the imaginative level, where the actual transforming power resides, and the emotional level connected to the feelings embodied in the metaphor. The metaphor's simultaneous operation on these three levels enables metaphor to make a deep connection to the psyche. Woodman elaborates: "If the metaphor really hits you, it gives you goose pimples; you say, 'Ah, that's it, that's

it, yes.' The whole being is momentarily brought into a sense of wholeness". (54) Thus, by approaching metaphor from this perspective, we can see why it can be so engaging. We are able to use all of our faculties; none are denied. We can use the literal on the mental level, as we interpret the basic connection between the two items as well as the imagination, which is exercised in the ability to make the connection in the first place. Finally, there is the emotional impact made by the feelings evoked by this connection. The combination of these three essential aspects of the human psyche, the literal, creative and emotional, engage the audience on several different levels and therefore can break through any social barriers that may be in place. Because metaphor can affect the audience on one of several levels, the chances of the metaphor breaking through the social cohesion that exists in teen culture on at least one of these levels is far greater than if the playwright was trying to appeal on only one level. By using metaphor, therefore, the playwright is more likely to be able to engage her audience; once the teens are engaged on one of these levels, the other levels are likely to eventually seep in and have an impact on the audience members. As Redington and Turner also assert, all theatre, but especially that which makes exceptional use of imagery and metaphor, can communicate in a unique and sensitive way that, by logical extension, would allow discussion about difficult topics.

The field of phenomenology can also offer an unexplored avenue through which to discuss the concept of visual image and metaphor and how they can engage an audience. This is merely a preliminary foray into this undeveloped connection; further exploration of this idea lies outside the scope of this paper. For the purposes of my discussion, I will isolate several theories from phenomenology and explore how they can

be related to the function of image and metaphor. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, one of the founders of phenomenology, outlined the concept that there are two modes of being, consciousness and things. Consciousness is

> characterized by its intentionality and by its ability to transcend or overcome its facticity in a movement into the future. Consciousness is therefore at once freedom and certitude as it strives to overcome or escape from all the facticity that threatens to drag it back to the in-itself existence of things. (Macey 247)

If we consider the field of "things" to encompass literal language and straight-forward thinking, then the creation of metaphor occurs in the attribution of consciousness, or intentionality, to an object from the realm of things. By infusing an ordinary object with the ability to "overcome or escape" from facticity, it is removed from the literal world and allowed to take on alternate and unusual meanings. This is allowed to happen in the realm of consciousness because the main modality of consciousness is perception, and "perception is not merely a matter of the registration of objective data: consciousness of something implies that something shows or reveals itself as a phenomenon" (Macey 248). Thus, we do not perceive something within the realm of consciousness as literal, objective, factual or containing only one meaning. By transferring an object into consciousness, it gains a phenomenal life, and can be read as such.

In Thomas J. Csordas' article "Embodiment and Cultural Phenomenology", he discusses how the "text metaphor has virtually [. . .] gobbled up the body itself" (146), and as a result of the past century's focus on text and structure, the notion of experience has fallen aside. In his critique of the loss of experience we find many parallels with the function and operation of image and metaphor. He criticizes the concept that

"representation does not denote experience, but constitutes it" (146). As he says, this eliminates the gap between language and experience. However, instead of overcoming the initial dualism, it acts by "*reducing* experience to language, or discourse, or representation" (146). Thus, we end up with only one category, that of representation. If we draw a parallel between representation and text, whether read or performed, there is no space left for metaphor or image. However, Csordas offers an alternative through the phenomenological concept that "language can *disclose* experience", and that "representation constitutes experience and reality as a text *or* that it discloses their embodied immediacy" (146). If a playwright allows the representation onstage to reveal the embodied immediacy of the subject (ie. through a visual medium like image or metaphor) rather than form a pre-determined version of the experience (ie. through text), the metaphor and images can complement and expand upon the textual representation rather than allow the text to dominate.

Furthermore, as Csordas describes Merleau-Ponty as saying, culture (and thus creativity) "does not reside only in objects and representations, but also in the bodily processes of perception by which those representations come into being" (147). Thus, theatre (as an aspect of culture) lives not only within the text, but also within the indescribable impact of the visual images which can portray the ideas behind this text on the stage. Creativity, which is obviously used extensively in the theatre, constitutes "a sense of intentional threads that trace the connections between ourselves and our worlds, an image of perception as tracing an intentional arc through the world – all meant to convey a sense of existential meaning beyond representational meaning" (147). This description of the creative process reflects the purpose and function of image and

metaphor: they make connections that go beyond ordinary, textual (or representational) meaning and imply far more (existential meaning) than is possible with mere representation. Csordas also raises the concept that "ideas have to be tested against the *whole* of our experience" (150), translating into the concept that ideas onstage must be given whole expression, not just verbal/textual expression. We must use all our senses, including the "prereflective gut feeling and sensory engagement" (150), to react to what is being revealed onstage.

Phenomenological theory offers a way of examining images that can consider both the individual perception of each spectator and the immediate, embodied experience of that image as it is projected from the stage. This can then create a powerful, new way of analysing images onstage, for as Csordas says, "to work in a 'paradigm of embodiment' is not to study anything new or different, but to address familiar topics – healing, emotion, gender, or power – from a different standpoint" (147). If the playwright can give power over to the possibility embedded in an image, rather than focusing only on the text, she can access a whole realm of suggestion, emotion and subjectivity denied us by text alone. Csordas quotes historian Morris Berman as saying "History gets written with the mind holding the pen. What would it look like, what would it read like, if it got written with the body holding the pen?" (149). This is what image can offer – a chance for the body to hold the pen, to express the inexpressible, to describe the indescribable.

Conclusion

Having explored the many benefits of using theatre as a method of communication, I have shown that theatre can allow teenagers to wear a kind of mask, and thus explore different identities and recognize alternatives in their lives because of the anonymity this mask provides. The unique use of imagination in theatre opens up avenues of discussion with teens, encouraging them to be self-reflexive and think critically about their life. By having an outside theatre group engage the teenagers in an active type of communication, the teens are not only communicating with non-threatening actors, but are also learning by participating. In order for this communication to take place, many receptive strategies must be used by playwrights to convince the adolescents to take part in this communication process and break through the social restraints that exist in teen culture. There is always a tendency for audiences to react cohesively, but when the additional pressures of adolescence are combined with this typical reaction, teenagers will have an even stronger desire to react the same way as their peers, and playwrights must discover ways in which to circumvent this phenomenon. Identification is one of the successful receptive strategies that can be used by playwrights to disrupt social cohesion. It depends a great deal on a shared socio-cultural background between the playwright and the teenagers. This background can include common issues, appropriate language and characters similar to the teens themselves. Another way to break social constraints is through the idea of being a co-creator of the performance, since the inclusion of blanks and gaps can draw a spectator into the action and engage them. Focussing more on a dialogic approach as opposed to a didactic one often appeals

more to teenagers, and using images and metaphor is a final way to achieve this delicate balance. In my analysis of *Wrecked!*, *Are We There Yet?*, and *The Tale of Teeka*, I will be using the concepts and theories explored here to unpack exactly why they have proved to be successful with teenagers and what about them can provoke discussion and communication about sensitive issues.

CHAPTER TWO: IDENTIFICATION IN *WRECKED!*

"We must show them the best theatre we can; we must strive to speak to them directly, in their own language, to move them, to enrapture them." (Craddock 2)

Identification can be a very effective way for playwrights to break through the social restraints that exist amongst a teen peer group and encourage them to respond to and accept a play[1]. One playwright who uses identification to great effect is Edmonton's Chris Craddock. His work with Azimuth Theatre has led to the creation of several plays for teenagers which address difficult social issues such as suicide, homosexuality, and fitting in. In one of his most popular plays, *Wrecked!*, he deals with issues surrounding substance abuse, approached from many different angles. The main story revolves around the character of Lyle. He has an alcoholic mother and a younger sister for whom he is responsible because of his mother's addiction, and a best friend, Buddy, who is addicted to marijuana. As the play progresses, we see how difficult life has become for Lyle as he attempts to act as the parent for both his mother and his sister and he is forced to make difficult, hurtful decisions for the protection of his sister, Susy. Craddock introduces a monster metaphor to explain the way people change when they drink, and Susy latches onto the Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde story as a way to comprehend her mother's inconsistent behaviour. Believing that her mother actually drinks potion, Susy decides to develop an antidote and inadvertently poisons her mother, which prompts Lyle to take the drastic step of moving himself and Susy out of the house and into their own apartment.

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[1] Please pages 19-25 of Chapter One.

During the play, Lyle also confronts Buddy about his drug use. This is one of the many places where Craddock attempts to break through the existing social barriers and reach the teenage audience. By showing his understanding that substance abuse is not just a teen problem, or just an adult problem, he demonstrates his respect for the teens and his understanding for the types of issues that they face in their lives. *Wrecked!* is not a play just about alcoholic parents, or just about teen drug abuse; Craddock explores all aspects of substance abuse, and because of this varied approach, he avoids becoming didactic. To focus just on teen abuse and try to convince teens that they should never use alcohol or drugs would be likely to backfire, since it can be perceived as the always-right, always-perfect adult authority figure telling adolescents what to do. On the other hand, to focus only on the difficulty of having an alcoholic parent could demonize the parent, and make no connection between the problems faced by adults and those faced by teens. Craddock therefore carefully constructs the character of Sharon, Lyle's mother, in such a way that she neither appears perfect nor despicable. While she is seen as the villain through Lyle's eyes, there are also moments which encourage the audience to sympathize with her, and recognize her struggle with her addiction. We see her attempt to care for Susy in the following exchance:

Sharon: How you doing, kid?

Susy: Fine.

Sharon: Good. . . . Um, what did you have for lunch today?

Susy: What did I have for lunch today?

Sharon: Yeah. I uh, I wasn't feeling good this morning so I slept in, and uh, I never made you lunch.

Susy: Lyle gave me some money.

Sharon: Oh. (62)

In her own way, Sharon is trying to show motherly concern and make sure that her child is looked after. It may be too little, too late, but we can see the guilt behind Sharon's words, and the remorse she feels for not being a better mother. Two scenes later, we learn about life from Sharon's perspective as she talks with the Bartender:

> It's the divorce. It screws up everybody. Them. Me. The only happy one is him. Him and that . . . child he ran off with. That's how it is, I guess. We women get traded in and you men just get better looking. He said he was leaving 'cause I was a drunk. But I guess he didn't mind a drunk raising his kids, did he? [. . .] I hurt my ankle playing tennis. Tylenol threes do nothing, so I switched to bourbon. I switched to bourbon, he switched to Bar-ba-ra. [. . .] Pretty soon him and Barbara were playing every day. He looked so [*bewildered, hurt*] . . . happy . . . [*regaining her bluster*]. I tell ya – this family has gone from quasi-functional to screwed-right-up in the three years since Bill left. And he doesn't know a damn thing about it. (66-67)

In this scene, we are made aware of the difficulties that Sharon has faced in her life, and it provides a more realistic and understandable context in which to view her addiction. While none of the problems she mentions are accepted as excuses, they can be seen as reasons for her behaviour, and create a more developed character. Because Craddock combines the issues of both teen and adult substance abuse, he establishes a scenario in which there is a flawed but struggling parent who is trying to do the right thing despite her addiction, as well as a teen who is slowly narrowing his opportunities in life because

of his drug habit. By drawing parallels between these two situations, Craddock shows the teens that he is judging neither. He implies that since both young people and adults make mistakes and have problems to deal with, the adult has no right to judge the teen. Likewise, since they share the same issues, the teen's problem should be considered just as serious as the adult's.

As Bennett, Whitmore and Mirrione demonstrate in their respective explorations of identification[2], one of the first elements that must be present in order for a playwright to engender identification with his audience is a shared socio-cultural background; in *Wrecked!*, Chris Craddock demonstrates this innate understanding of teen culture time and again. I will show how he relates specifically to the teens and also understands their lives on a more general level. A fault of many plays for young audiences is the obvious fact that the playwright has forgotten entirely what it is actually like to be a teenager. Craddock, on the other hand, has managed to retain this perspective, lending credibility to and inviting respect for his work. As he says in his introduction to *Wrecked!*,

> I knew I wouldn't get far trying to convince kids that there was no fun at all in drinking and doing drugs at parties. I myself drank and did drugs at parties all the time when I was a teen, and had lots of great fun. But I also got into lots of scrapes while drinking and doing drugs, and there were many times that it was only dumb luck that I didn't end up dead or arrested or kicked out of school. (2)

This relatively unique perspective is what gives Craddock's work for young people such credence with his audience. His writing is infused with this attitude of "I've been there, done that, and had lots of fun – but here are a few things to think about so that you can

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[2] See pages 19-20 of Chapter One for a more detailed discussion of the need for a shared socio-cultural background.

stay relatively safe while having fun". He has retained enough of his teenage memories to relate to his audience, and has avoided the oft-seen perspective that "if we talk about it, the kids are going to do it". As he says,

> To speak to kids directly and in an unpedantic *(sic)* fashion, you have to be a bit sneaky. You have to strike a balance between what you know kids know and what parents and teachers are willing to admit kids know. You have to think back and remember yourself at that age. And you must try to avoid preaching… and foul language… and also blasphemy. Within these restrictions is a marvellous opportunity for subversion, and I believe kids watch out for subversion and love it to bits. (2)

The key point here is the balance between what Craddock knows kids know and what parents and teachers will accept they know. Craddock writes frankly about the positives and negatives of drinking and drugs, and deals with substance abuse in an honest and respectful manner. This is the first step in breaking the social restraints of his audience. By putting himself on the same level as his audience, Craddock avoids the preaching and didactic approach that is so often seen, and instead invites the teens to consider what he is saying, judge it for themselves, and draw their own conclusions about his message. His insistence that the teens are intelligent, rational people who can make smart choices if they choose to appeals to his audience. As I demonstrated in my discussion of open, dialectic theatre as opposed to didactic, patronizing theatre in my first chapter[3], this respectful approach causes the teens to let down some of the barriers they innately hold in place against any adult who tries to tell them what to do. Craddock wants the teens to

[3] Please refer to pages 28-30 in Chapter One

"Challenge your teachers. Debate with your parents. Think for yourself" (3), and *Wrecked!* demonstrates this consistently.

Craddock uses ironic exchanges between a group of nameless teens, which are interspersed throughout the main plot-line of the play, to show this understanding of teen culture. Each one focuses on a slightly different aspect of drinking or using drugs. As the play progresses, the segments get more and more serious until finally the choice to drink and drive made by a drunken teenager leads to several fatalities. In these scenes, Craddock captures the reality of using substances, examining both the benefits and the negative consequences. The strength of these passages is their honestly ironic look at how people react to and feel about their behaviour once they are sober. Anyone who has listened to teens talking about their weekend will recognize the reality in these segments. Craddock follows a repetitive rhythmic structure in each which mimics the short-phrased, one-word-answer type of conversation often heard amongst teenaged peers. The first, which also opens the play, deals partly with sex:

> One: Last night I got so drunk. [. . .] I had this mix from my parents' liquor cabinet. You've seen my parents' liquor cabinet.
>
> Two: Nice liquor cabinet.
>
> One: Exactly. So I got an ounce of this, an ounce of that, like fourteen ounces of hard alcohol all mixed up in my coke slurpee. I am set and the party is jumping. [. . .] And pretty soon I see Sharlene.
>
> Three: Hi!

One: Hi! . . . and she is just as drunk as I am. [. . .] And since I was pissed and Sharlene was pissed, we, uh, got together, you know what I'm saying, it was all friendly, I think you know what I mean.

Three: When I get drunk… I just – I was gonna wait. At least until he bought me dinner or something. But I was drunk, so… [. . .]

Three: I think I'm pregnant.

One: Oh my god. (51-54)

With this scene, Craddock immediately establishes a connection with his audience. Funny, relevant and real, Craddock approaches issues related to drinking and drugs in a manner that engages his audience and convinces them to trust him. This strong initial impression that he understands their lives and what concerns them and is not just another authority figure telling them not to ever drink or try drugs is the first way in which Craddock breaks through the scepticism with which most teen audiences approach anything meant to be good for them.

The fact that Craddock addresses the teens' actual concerns, rather than those which parents and teachers might prefer to focus on, is another way in which he engages them and convinces them to buy into the play. As Joanna Bell demonstrates in her study of adolescent concerns[4], there is often a discrepancy between what teens actually worry about and what adults think they do. For instance, adults are more likely to focus on the health risks of drinking or drugs; encourage complete abstinence; provide practical advice about alcoholic parents; or warn against the dangers of driving while drunk or high, while teens are likely to be more concerned about getting caught drinking; the social and personal repercussions of getting pregnant while drinking; how peers will view

[4] Please see pages 21-2 in Chapter One for details.

them if negative information about their family life is widely known, and so on. In this sense, *Wrecked!* focuses on the issues that teens truly care about. This is first apparent in the general teen scenes. The first one deals with the serious but not life-threatening consequences of drinking too much and losing control of oneself. In it, one teen is discussing a fight that occurred, and says

> And I was really pissed, but even still, when he hit me, it hurt. But then, I hit him back and he went down hard… partly… cause he was so pissed, and he hit his head on the stereo, which broke… his head AND the stereo… and he needed stitches, so, hey… you know… I won the fight. [. . .] My parents are going to kill me. (51-53)

This teen is obviously more concerned about winning the fight and what the parents are going to do than about the welfare of the other participant or either one's extreme drunkenness. Later on in this scene, another teen describes his experience at the party:

> So, I had puked a lot in the past. I mean, there is usually a certain amount of puking, but this was a lot of puking even for me, on account of the mickey of vodka I pounded and we had done the drive-through and I had the two cheeseburger meal. So I puked and puked and this was only like eight o'clock so when eleven came around and everyone else had to puke I was already passed out with my head in the can. Everybody else had to puke in the flower garden. [. . .] So then the cops came, and everybody wanted to get in the bathroom, cause tons of people had dope and they all wanted to flush it down the toilet. But I was puking and all and I had the door locked, so. . . some guys got busted. That's what I heard, anyhow. (53)

He is more concerned that when the cops were called people got caught with drugs than the danger of drinking so excessively, or the casual normality of everybody starting to throw up at a certain time in the evening because they have had too much to drink. Craddock subtly highlights the possible dangers of drinking, but in such a way that, on the surface, it addresses the real concerns of the teens (ie. getting caught by the cops).

The next scene becomes more serious when a group of teens are caught driving while extremely drunk and also high on acid. During the entire scene, the teens are joking and laughing about it:

> One: So we're on the road, swerving a bit, it's true. And we see this car coming the other way, so Chauncy's really pissed, so he thinks it'll be totally funny to flash his lights on and off and play La Cukaroacha on the horn.
>
> Two: And we are just trippin' in the back seat.
>
> Four: Okay, everyone can stop growing horns anytime now!
>
> Three: My hand is a pumpkin, then it's a fish, then it's my hand again.
>
> Two: And the car comin' down the road. It's a cop car.
>
> Four: Step out of the car, please.
>
> Two: But we are trippin' so hard…
>
> Four: The cop is an alien. THE COP IS AN ALIEN! (70-1)

The teens obviously find the whole situation very amusing and do not take it seriously. Even when they discuss the consequences, their priorities seem unusual to an adult perspective:

> Three: Chauncy loses his license. I think forever. I think even when Chauncy grows up and has kids, his kids lose their license.

One: And we all have to pick up garbage at the skating rink for our community hours.

Two: And my parents think I'm a criminal. Just because I got convicted of a crime.

Three: One hundred hours. That's like four months of weekends.

Four: Except for Eddy's cousin, who got caught with all that acid, which is called trafficking. He got tried as an adult and now is in prison and has a large boyfriend.

Three: And you missed the party! (71)

While adults, when discussing drunk driving, are more likely to emphasize factors like the risk of doing harm to others, the teens are more concerned about the impact that their community hours are going to have on their social life ("four months of weekends"), the opinion of their parents, and the fact that they missed a great party. They do not seem to really understand the seriousness of what they have done. While teenage audiences watching this are likely to recognize the danger in what occurred, Craddock is showing the teens that he understands what their concerns are, and that they are valid concerns even if they are not entirely in line with what adults might consider the main issues at stake. As Joanna Bell says about fostering positive youth development, "interventions that are not devised in light of a group's characteristics of individuality [. . .] are not likely to promote such development" (417). Thus, by focusing on the teens' actual concerns rather than those raised by parents or teachers, he convinces them to trust him and buy into the play.

Two teen scenes later, Craddock returns to the issue of drunk driving, but this time approaches it in a much more serious way. Suddenly, the normally-humorous teen scenes descend quickly into a grim reality:

One: It would've been fine, except I was so drunk. [. . .] So I get home, and I'm heading right to my room, cause I'm getting the spins and I gotta lie down and look at my lamp. [. . .] Except my Dad is totally pissed too and it turns out, he just smoked his last cigarette. [. . .] He'll think nothing of going out drunk and shooting at sparrows with his ten gauge. But he won't drive. Even one beer and he won't drive. He just won't. Something that happened in high school or something.

Two: What about your Mom?

One: It's a family affair, man. Mom's throwing up downstairs, she's out of the game. That leaves me to drive Dad to the store. He needs his cigarettes.

Two: But you're wasted.

One: Right.

Two: Did you come clean?

One: Not a chance. [. . .] So, I'm on the road, Dad's got his head out the window, it's dark out, and what's more, it's raining.

Two: Worst possible situation. [. . .]

One: It was raining. [. . .] It was dark. [. . .] I should not have been driving. [. . .] I should not have been driving. [. . .]

Two: And that's why everybody's dead.

Three: We are gathered here today . . .

One: I'm sorry.

Two: And you're dead too.

Three: To remember a family.

One: I'm so sorry.

Two: It's too late.

One: How late?

Two: Really late. (83-85)

The teen who drove is obviously remorseful and regrets his/her actions, but when making the decision to drive, his/her main concern was keeping his/her parents from finding out that he/she had been drinking. At that point, he/she makes the choice to protect him/herself at the risk of hurting others. While this seems selfish and wrong in hindsight, it is consistent with the issues on which teens focus. Suddenly, Craddock shows the teens just how important their decisions are, and the negative consequences that their actions can have. Up until this point, he has avoided passing judgement on the choices of the teens, but now he imparts a more obvious message: while making poor decisions and learning from mistakes is part of the maturation process, there are some choices that are not acceptable and cannot be forgiven just because one is only a teenager. Craddock shows the seriousness of this when he changes the pattern of the end sequence from the usual question of "how drunk?" or "how great?" to "how late?".

We also see the realistic issues that teens deal with in Lyle and Susy's main plot line. Their story reflects the practical reality of having an alcoholic parent rather than portraying an idealistic situation. There is no perfect, happy ending in which everything is resolved and everyone is reconciled. Lyle does his best to keep his family together, in

his own way, by hiding his mother's problem so that social workers will not interfere and split them up. As he says at the end, after moving himself and Susy out, "please don't tell social services on us, because then we'd get separated and put in foster homes and that would defeat the purpose of everything. Just trust that I can take care of us for a while" (100). Instead of getting help from adults, as most would likely suggest, Lyle takes care of things in his own way. At sixteen, he takes on the responsibility of caring for his younger sibling, but he prefers that to having others find out about his problems at home. There is no helpful adult mentor who steps in to solve the problem and help Lyle and Susy; there is none of the sentimental, perfect-ending help that is often included to resolve the issues in teens' lives in more overtly didactic work. Instead, Craddock gains the respect of his teenage audience by showing that he understands the reality of having to deal with this sort of issue, rather than pretending that everything can be worked out perfectly for everyone. This is shown in Lyle's conversation with the Bartender:

> Bartender: I can understand that you wouldn't want me involved in your affairs, so I'll just say one more thing. Your mother's drinking, it's a disease. You can't cure it, you didn't cause it, and you can't control it.
>
> Lyle: *Shrugs*. I know that.
>
> Bartender: Oh, you do?
>
> Lyle: I read it someplace.
>
> Bartender: *A little taken aback.* Well. Good. (94)

Craddock recognizes that the best intentions adults may have in trying to educate teens about their parent's alcoholism is not always enough; sometimes, the teens have to deal with things on their own and make the best of their own situation.

Lyle also tries to hide his mother's problem from Buddy, reflecting the very real and common fear of teenagers that their peers will discover their problems and judge them accordingly. Even though they are best friends, Lyle is reluctant to confide in Buddy:

Buddy: But – won't your Mom be pissed?

Lyle: What?

Buddy: Like mad at you. About the commercial.

Lyle: Why?

Buddy: Well. . . the commercial is totally harsh about alcoholics.

Lyle: Yeah?

Buddy: And your Mom is totally . . a . . .

Lyle: . . . a what?

Buddy: . . . Nothing.

Lyle: Good. (57)

Lyle is more concerned with keeping his problems private than with seeking help or comfort, and this is often the case with teens. They would prefer to deal with things on their own rather than open up about their issues. Thus, throughout all these various scenarios, Craddock shows respect and understanding of the true concerns of teenagers, rather than trying to force an adult perspective on them, which helps break through the social cohesion that often prevents teens from accepting a piece of theatre that is meant to teach them something.[5]

Wrecked! also uses language as a way to convince teens to buy into the show and connect with the characters. Using the common slang of teen culture, Craddock is able to

[5] Please see pages 29-30 for a more in-depth discussion of this issue.

show his audience immediately that he shares something with them. This sharing of a common language invites the teens to identify with the characters onstage, and helps to break through the teen's social scepticism. When language is used correctly, as Jim Mirrione writes[6], students react as if "someone had broken a code and spoken to them about the things they knew. This reaction can immediately ease tension student audiences have" (85-6). Craddock is exceptionally good at using the right contemporary language without sounding like an adult who is trying to 'be cool' and talk like a teenager. One style of speech he uses that makes a strong connection with his audience is during the anonymous teen scenes. The speech patterns he develops, the idioms he uses, and the slang he employs all combine to create a very representative account of how teens generally converse with each other. This scene begins and ends with an exchange pattern that Craddock repeats several times throughout the script:

One: Let me begin by saying, I was totally pissed.

Two: Wasted?

Three: Pissed.

Four: How pissed?

One: Wrecked. On account of having shotgun six beers standing the bathtub with my man Chauncy who really shouldn't've been driving.

Two: But we went the back way.

Four: We drove real slow.

Three: Hardly any traffic.

Two: We gotta get to the party.

---

[6] Please see page 23 of Chapter One for more detailed information about the use of language with teenagers.

One: Totally pissed. But Chauncy swears it just makes him a better driver, and I was too drunk to argue. [. . .]

Three: And you missed the party!

One: How was it?

Two: Good party.

Three: Fine party.

Four: Great party. (69-72)

The short, repetitive, almost-one-word responses resonate with the kind of speech adults tend to associate with teen culture. This type of conversation is very much a part of the adolescent world, and most young people will recognize either themselves or someone they know in the rhythm of the language. Rather than throw in every teen slang word there is in an attempt to show that he understands them, Craddock uses them sparingly and selectively, sticking to only a few that are repeated over and over, such as "pissed". This is more authentic, as each social group will often develop their own lingo and have certain words that they commonly use. It is obvious that Craddock has an innate understanding of the speech pattern and use of slang common to social grouping of adolescents.

However, Craddock cleverly keeps from denigrating teen's intelligence in the language pattern he develops for Lyle. While the pattern he establishes in the teen sequences is very authentic, it is by no means the only way youth can converse. Like most adults, they will change their speech pattern to suit the company they are in. In *Wrecked!*, the teens use more slang and shorter sentences when with close friends. Conversely, when confronted with a more adult situation, we see Lyle using a different

kind of speech. Thus, Craddock shows his audience that he is aware that teens are often more intelligent and aware than their language may reflect. Lyle's smart, sarcastic speech demonstrates to a teen audience that Craddock both respects teens and understands their instinct to use sarcasm and derision as a way to assert agency and gain a place in an adult world that expects them to be adults but treats them as children. Lyle's use of irony and sarcasm in much of his dialogue with adults is also very representative of the way that many teens talk with the adult figures in their lives. This is yet another way in which Craddock uses language to create a connection with his audience and convince them that he understands their situation, and that therefore they should trust what he is saying and accept the message of his play. Lyle's ability to take control of a situation and assert his power through his use of language is seen in the morning after scene with his mother and the Bartender:

> Lyle: Hello. You must be a friend of our dear mother. I'm Lyle and you've met Susy. What might your name be?
>
> Bartender: I'm the bartender.
>
> Lyle: I see. So that makes you less a friend of my mother, than a kind of professional associate.
>
> Bartender: What?
>
> Lyle: It doesn't matter. I haven't made coffee because it stunts our growth, but I guess you'd like some, huh?
>
> Bartender: Yeah. If it's –
>
> Lyle: No trouble at all. Any one-night stand my drunken mother brings home deserves all the compassion I can muster.

Bartender: Your brother talks pretty fast.

Susy: *Smiles.* Yeah.

Lyle: I'll thank you not to address my sister. She's young yet, you see, and I'd like her to stay that way for the natural amount of time.

Bartender: I'm sorry – I didn't mean anything.

Lyle: No. I'm sure you don't mean anything at all.

Sharon enters. [. . .]

Lyle: Well, I'm sure you two have a lot to discuss. You'll probably want to find out each other's names and –

Sharon: Please, Lyle. I have a headache.

Lyle: What a surprise! I think I might faint dead away from the weight of the shock. (72-3)

From an adult perspective, Lyle might seem insolent and disrespectful, but his use of sarcasm allows him to establish control and agency in a painful situation in which the familial roles have been reversed. He has become the parent to both his sister and his mother, and will eventually have the power to change their situation. As a teenager, Lyle does not have access to the usual routes of parental control. He does not possess innate authority just because he is a parent – he must work for it and constantly reassert his power. He does this through his use of sarcasm; it disarms his opponents and allows him to keep control over the situation. An adult dismissive of his rebellious attitude would also miss the wit and intelligence that underlies much of what Lyle says. This recognition that teens can actually assert power and demonstrate intelligence through their subversive

use of sarcasm helps to endear Craddock and *Wrecked!* to their audience and encourages this audience to resist the usual social constraints that keep them distanced and doubtful.

Closely connected to the type of language used is the issue of character. *Wrecked!* includes many characters to which teens can easily relate, and, as Jim Mirrione demonstrates, this helps to immediately engage the audience. If the teens recognize the characters onstage, and see them as authentic, they will be more likely to trust the playwright and let go of their preconceptions about theatre that is meant to instruct in some way[7]. Craddock's characters are all closely connected to reality, but the one who often gets the most vigorous response is Buddy, Lyle's pot-smoking best friend. This point emerged during an interview with Murray Utas, an Edmonton-based actor who has played Buddy in several productions of *Wrecked!*. He recalled how, when asked who their favourite character was during talkback sessions, the teenagers would often identify Buddy. When asked to explain why, they would say "we know people just like him!". Buddy is a caring friend, but as the play progresses, it becomes obvious that his drug use is starting to affect his ability to live a productive life and move ahead in the world. In the beginning, Lyle mostly ignores Buddy's problem:

> Lyle: Are you high?
>
> Buddy: Um. . . no.
>
> Lyle: We said no smoking while we work on the thing.
>
> Buddy: Dude! I haven't smoked at all today.
>
> Lyle: Buddy?
>
> Buddy: Okay, I smoked a little roach, so what?

---

[7] Please see pages 23-4 of Chapter One for my discussion on the use of character as a means of engendering identification, including Mirrione's demonstration of this phenomenon.

Lyle: Buddy – Whatever. As long as you're ready. (54-55)

This is the first time we meet Buddy, and at this point his drug habit seems relatively harmless and amusing. Craddock smartly introduces Buddy in a positive light, and immediately makes him endearing to his audience so that they will identify with him. He is the comic foil, the sidekick to Lyle's protagonist. However, his situation reveals itself to be more serious later on when Lyle tries again to confront Buddy about his problem:

Lyle: We've been friends since we were kids [. . .] And our friendship has lasted despite of (*sic*) many things that can break a friendship up. [. . .] Like the fact that you're two grades behind me, even though we're the same age. [. . .] And the fact that you often fall asleep when I'm talking to you.

Buddy: Dude, I'm sorry about that. But you talk so fast sometimes man, and I get tired.

Lyle: What's my phone number?

Buddy: I hate it when you do this man –

Lyle: Just humour me.

Buddy: Okay I don't remember. [. . .] But I don't need to remember, cause I wrote it down on this piece of paper I keep in my pocket.

Lyle: Buddy, I've had the same phone number since we were six. Why can't you remember?

Buddy: *Toking*. I forget things.

Lyle: Did you ever think that maybe pot makes you dumb? . . . Buddy?

Buddy: I'm sorry, I was looking at my thumb.

Lyle: Forget it. (86-87)

In this segment, it becomes clear that his pot habit is actually having a detrimental effect on Buddy, but Craddock does not fall into the same trap as many writers for young audiences. Instead of resolving the issue in the end, he trusts the intelligence and judgement of his adolescent audience, and allows them to draw their own conclusions about Buddy's behaviour and its possible consequences. Jim Mirrione observes that young people respond the most to characters who

> constantly provoked the audience and emotionally affected them because they were seen in highly charged situations similar to their own lives. This identification with characters also allowed them to scrutinize their motivations and to see how all actions resulted in choices and consequences. (89-90)

Mirrione highlights the important fact that a strong identification with a character does not merely encourage joyful recognition, but can also lead to self-reflection and an objective analysis of that character's decisions and faults. As the result of a mistaken assumption that teenagers need clear answers and cannot logically deduce consequences on their own, many writers would feel obliged to include a positive ending for Buddy, showing some change in his character or behaviour. Craddock, however, by innately comprehending the principle outlined by Mirrione above, engages his audience more by leaving this ending unresolved and allowing the teens to use their intelligence and understanding to foresee the likely outcome themselves.

The character of Buddy resonates far more with the audience because of his authenticity, which comes from Craddock's refusal to give into often-expressed parental and teacher expectations of proper examples to set for teens. Utas recalls one incident which illustrates why the character of Buddy can show teens that making a choice like he

does can be harmful. During one talkback session, the principal of the school raised the concern that since Buddy was such a loveable character, and obviously the favourite of the students, would not his behaviour just encourage the teens to emulate him? Utas replied indirectly by asking the teens first whether they liked Buddy, to which they all replied yes. He then asked them whether they would want to *be* Buddy, and the response was unanimous. They all agreed that they would never want to be Buddy because "he is a loser who is going to fail out of school", and then "he would not be able to get a job or go on to more school" (Utas). While they enjoyed his humorous antics, and knew people in their lives like him, most of the students were smart and perceptive enough to realize that they themselves did not wish to turn out like him. Thus, Craddock's subtle approach to relaying this message obviously works, and is likely more successful than if he had been obvious or didactic. This respectful and subtle approach to portraying character is one way in which *Wrecked!* breaks through the ingrained impulse in most teens to reject anything that is trying to tell them what to do.

The structure of *Wrecked!* also cultivates identification through the seemingly opposite technique of Brechtian alienation. The basic structure of Craddock's play consists of generic teen scenes which are interspersed throughout the main plot. The primary story line concerning Lyle, Buddy and Susy is told in a linear, traditional, story-telling style and thus does not impart as much of a strong message since there is ostensibly no narrator passing judgement on the actions of the characters. In the general teen scenes, in which Craddock focuses more directly on substance abuse issues, there is a slightly more didactic feeling as they impart information in a more straight-forward manner. This alternating pattern, in which general teen scenes are interjected into the

main story line at regular intervals, constitutes a rupture in the narrative. This rupture disrupts the identification process at first, since just as the audience is starting to empathize with the characters, connect to their story and get drawn into their lives, the scene will end abruptly and be replaced by a generic teen scene, drawing the audience's attention to the issue at hand rather than remaining emotionally involved. The disruption allows the audience to focus more on both the main issues surrounding substance abuse as well as a wider range of characters. This interspersing pattern is reminiscent of the pattern in many of Brecht's plays, in which he would, for example, interrupt the main plotline with large placards announcing the beginning of the next scene, and giving details about either the scene to come or historical background about the events to be portrayed (Willett 180). Craddock has borrowed from Brecht's alienation techniques in order to keep his audience somewhat removed from the characters in *Wrecked!*; this distancing encourages the audience to analyse the situation and behaviour of the main characters and approach the play in a more critical manner. As Brecht asserts in one of his many essays on theatre, collected by John Willett in *Brecht on Theatre*, "We have to make it possible for him [the spectator] to take a critical attitude while he is in the theatre (as opposed to a subjective attitude of becoming completely 'entangled' in what is going on)" (78). Brecht later describes how this critical and objective position can be achieved through the structure of the play:

> As we cannot invite the audience to fling itself into the story as if it were a river and let itself be carried vaguely hither and thither, the individual episodes have to be knotted together in such a way that the knots are easily noticed. The episodes must not succeed one another indistinguishably but must give us a chance to

> interpose our judgement [. . .] The parts of the story have to be carefully set off one against another by giving each its own structure as a play within the play. (201)

By manipulating the structure in this way to promote a rational approach, the audience is encouraged to develop their own individual judgement of the situation and characters; this in turn incites self-reflexive examination. Because they are forced by the structure of the play to think critically about the characters and then about themselves, the audience is encouraged to make connections between their lives and those which are playing out onstage. By relating their own experiences to those of the characters, the audience members are thus more able to identify with the characters' situation and decisions. Therefore, Craddock's structural use of alienation techniques in *Wrecked!* ultimately engenders identification.

In light of this analysis of *Wrecked!*, Craddock has certainly achieved his goal of engaging his audience. Through his understanding and knowledge of adolescents' socio-cultural background and the issues they truly care about, Craddock is able to disrupt the normal social conventions of teen culture and engage his audience, thus allowing him to present a moderately cautionary viewpoint. His use of language and development of character as well as his structural use of alienation techniques combine to create a script that, when performed, will capture his audience and as a result encourage them to accept the knowledge and information he imparts.

CHAPTER THREE: ISER'S THEORY OF BLANKS IN *ARE WE THERE YET?*

"It requires a rich imagination on the part of the deviser or writer to find a structure and form, a style of presentation and performance that will engage and involve the audience or participants. Entertainment does not necessarily imply a light-weight relationship between content and audience, or actor and audience. It does not mean 'make 'em laugh'. It is the engagement achieved, the involvement and trust established."
(Pammenter 61)

The next focus of my analysis, *Are We There Yet?*, also uses aspects of identification to engage its audience and break through their social barriers. However, the main receptive strategy employed by playwright Jane Heather is the participatory aspect of the play, and thus its dialectical nature. By inviting the teenagers to become "self-consciousness co-creator(s)" (Bennett 21) of the performance, Heather is demonstrating her understanding of adolescents' need to be in control and have some say about their environment. As Carl Gardner asserts in *Theatre Audiences*, "The 'receiver' of any 'message' is never passive [. . .] but is an active *producer* of meanings" (Bennett 30). Heather's use of participatory techniques allows the teenagers to literally become active producers of meaning during the course of the play as they are allowed to have input and, to some extent, control the direction of the plot and characters. These techniques allow the spectators themselves to "bring the story to life, to assign meaning" (Bennett 44). This respect for their ideas and desire to dialogue with them helps Heather break through social restraints and encourages them to not only accept the play, but to actively participate in it. As Heather herself says, "I believe that teens know what good sexual decisions are, they've just never had a chance to talk it all through together". In my

discussion of *Are We There Yet?*, I will be drawing primarily on the script, but will also allow my own anecdotal responses to a performance I attended to inform my analysis. Since *Are We There Yet?* is performed using participatory techniques, this analysis of both script and performance is necessary to gain a complete picture of how audiences respond to it.

Are We There Yet? was commissioned by Concrete Theatre and Planned Parenthood with the express purpose of creating a piece of interactive theatre which would teach young teenagers about healthy sexuality. It is meant to be produced in tandem with a workshop that focuses on factual information and specifics about birth control and safe sex. The fact that the play is performed by an outside group of actors is the first way in which it is able to break through the social barriers of the teen audience. As Redington says, "Without doubt, the presence of an outside troupe dealing with such a delicate topic made it easier to deal with internally [. . .] Teams are able to introduce themes and methods into a school which a teacher would find it hard to do as an individual" (192/211).[8] Thus, an outside group interacting with a student audience can allow the actors to broach issues such as sexuality which are often too disturbing or sensitive for teachers or parents to bring up. Once these issues are raised, however, the teachers can then expand on them since a comfortable and safe zone has been created in which the teenagers can communicate. The presence of an outside group creates a liminal space in which the adolescents are able to raise issues and concerns which they might otherwise feel uncomfortable discussing.[9]

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[8] Please see page 7-8 of Chapter One.
[9] Please refer to my discussion on creating self-reflexive space on page 15-6 of Chapter One

Are We There Yet? looks at how to make responsible choices, the emotional aspect of sex and how to deal with various situations which may arise during sexual activity. This is all done using unique participatory techniques which actively involve the teens in shaping each performance. This active involvement reveals its effectiveness when witnessed, but in order to analyse exactly why *Are We There Yet?* is able to draw in a teen audience and encourage them to participate, we must look to a theoretical framework which can lend credence to these techniques, the significance and success of which becomes obvious when directly observed. Wolfgang Iser's theory of blanks offers a remarkably effective yet underused method of analysing this participatory phenomenon.

Iser studies the interaction between a text and the reader, which can easily be translated into a dramatic context if we look at the script as the text, and the audience member as the reader. Iser talks about how contingency is a crucial part of this interaction in that each partner brings a specific "behavioural plan" to the interaction and that these behavioural plans can be modified and adjusted. As he says,

> As a result of the interaction, the behavioral (*sic*) plans are subjected to various tests, and these, in turn, show up deficiencies which themselves are contingent in so far as they reveal limitations in the plans that might not otherwise have been revealed. Such deficiencies generally tend to be productive, because they can bring about new strategies of behavior, as well as modifications in the behavioral plan. (164)

Thus, in light of this definition of interaction, the interface between the text of *Are We There Yet?* (as delivered by the actors) and the audience can cause the teenagers to recognize poor decision-making in their own lives and question their preconceptions

about sex. Iser then moves into an exploration of how this questioning process occurs in a text and is controlled by its author. He begins by looking at social interaction, and discusses how we can never really know the views of our communication partner, but instead use a "filling-in process" to develop a personal perception of what the other person means (165). He then translates this into the interaction between text and reader, and refers to this filling-in as an "indeterminate, constitutive blank which underlies all processes of interaction" (167). He says that

> Balance can only be attained if the gaps are filled, and so the constitutive blank is continually bombarded with projections. The interaction fails if the mutual projections of the social partners do not change, or if the reader's projections superimpose themselves unimpeded upon the text. Failure, then, means filling the blank exclusively with one's own projections. Now as the blank gives rise to the reader's projections, but the text itself cannot change, it follows that a successful relationship between text and reader can only come about through changes in the reader's projections. (167)

As Iser states, if this communication is to be successful, there must be some control exerted by the text upon the reader in order for the reader to be compelled to reconsider his/her position and opinion. It is within these aforementioned blanks that the author of the text is able to manipulate, to varying extents, the reaction of the reader. This control denotes not only a push to change opinion, but also to engage with the material in the first place; thus, using Iser's theories, I will examine how *Are We There Yet?* draws a teenage audience in and convinces them to connect with and accept the message of the play.

This initial engagement, a necessary step before attempting to control the reader's response, comes about because of the blanks left within the text. Iser uses the example of Jane Austen to describe how she uses seemingly trivial emotions and situations to encourage her reader to fill in what is not explicitly said, and says of this,

> What is missing from the apparently trivial scenes, the gaps arising out of the dialogue – this is what stimulates the reader into filling in the blanks with projections. He is drawn into the events and made to supply what is meant from what is said. What *is* said only appears to take on significance as a reference to what is not said; it is the implications and not the statements that give shape and weight to the meaning. But as the unsaid comes to life in the reader's imagination, so the said "expands" to take on greater significance than might have been supposed: even trivial scenes can seem surprisingly profound. (168)

Because the text gives only suggestions or hints rather than providing the full story and complete emotion, it leaves blanks which we, the reader, must then fill in. It is this filling-in process that engages an audience and draws them into the world of the play, thus breaking through the social constraints that the adolescent audience instinctively brings into the room. We can see examples of this in *Are We There Yet?*, both in the sense which Iser intended and in a more literal manner.

First of all, playwright Jane Heather uses a sparseness of text that not only simulates how teenagers talk but also leaves room for interpretation by the audience. They are often made to fill in unspoken dialogue and complete suggestions of phrases. For example, in the scene about how to communicate, the opening sequence demonstrates how difficult it can be to actually say what you mean:

Delphi: Marcel, are you mad at me?

Marcel: No. Are you mad at me?

Delphi: No. *Pause.* Well… I guess I better go.

Marcel: No. No, don't go. I want you to see this. Sit down.

Delphi: Okay. *She sits beside him.*

Awkward silence. Marcel 'fakes' a big yawn and eases his arm around Delphi.

Delphi: I'm kinda hot.

Marcel: Oh sorry. *He moves away.*

Delphi: No, I mean… I'll take my sweater off.

Marcel: Ok.

She does. They sit. Delphi leans over and kisses Marcel on the neck.

Marcel: Delphi!

Delphi: *Very fast, prepared.* Marcel, I want you to know I wasn't comfortable before but now it's okay.

Marcel: So, can we…?

Delphi: Yes. *They kiss, Marcel wants to go further, Delphi pushes him away.* That's enough.

Marcel: What? What did I do?

Delphi: You don't get it, do you.

Marcel: No I don't. (9-10)

From this, the audience must literally read between the lines and decide for themselves what has occurred between Marcel and Delphi. Because Heather does not divulge all the details right away, the audience is engaged as they attempt to piece together what is going

on. Delphi and Marcel continually make vague, unfinished comments which, on the surface, mean very little but subtextually actually carry a lot of weight. Each audience member becomes a co-author of the performance as they read into this subtext in their own way, and create their own story surrounding the relationship of Delphi and Marcel. As Iser writes,

> The blanks break up the connectability of the schemata, and thus they marshal selected norms and perspective segments into a fragmented, counter-factual, contrastive or telescoped sequence, nullifying any expectation of *good continuation*. As a result, the imagination is automatically mobilized, thus increasing the constitutive activity of the reader, who cannot help but try and supply the missing links that will bring the schemata together into an integrated gestalt. (186, emphasis original).

Thus, because of the blanks in the scene quoted above, the audience is stimulated to use their imagination to link together the various fragmented phrases spoken by Delphi and Marcel into a cohesive whole, engaging their minds in a way which draws them into the play.

Another way in which Heather creates blanks in the piece is through the use of metaphor, which also further stimulates the imagination. Throughout the play, she compares learning about sex to learning to drive, and through this analogy places the responsibility of interpretation in the hands of her audience. Thus, she engages her audience by insisting that they use their imagination in order to equate what is being said explicitly about driving with how it relates implicitly to sex. This use of metaphor to engage her audience is a powerful element of how she breaks through her audience's

social constraints and encourages them to buy into the play and accept the messages being relayed. A pattern is established at the beginning of the play when one actor becomes the driving instructor and relates a specific aspect of sex to a corresponding aspect of driving. Lesson Two covers signs and signals:

> Once you are familiar with the vehicle, knowing how to read and interpret the signs can be the single most important way to prevent accidents. Sending and receiving clear signals will help you stay in control of the situation. Stop, yield, proceed with caution, slow ahead are all signs you need to be able to recognize in yourself and others. Sometimes, however, the signals aren't clearly sent so they can't be clearly received. (8)

This simple, clear, yet effective metaphor forces the teenagers to make connections between what is being said and what is being implied, and this active process will draw them into the performance. Because they are being encouraged to actively interpret, rather than just passively accept, a stronger connection will be established between themselves and the play. Using humour within this context is an added way in which Heather connects with her audience; the following humorous extended metaphor demonstrates this:

> Female: Oh man I'm driving.
>
> Male: Am I doing this right?
>
> Both: This is fun! This is fast! This is…
>
> Male: Holy hacky sack, what was that?
>
> Female: A sign. We were going too fast to read it.
>
> Male: It's a cliff!

Female: Put on the brake!

Male: I don't know where it is!

Female: Seatbelt! I forgot my seatbelt!

Male: Oh man! I thought you'd have an air bag!

Female: Me! I thought you'd have one! Pull over! I thought you said you would pull over!

Both: AHHHHHHHHHHH!!!!!

(*They go over the cliff and are thrown from the car. They crawl from the wreckage.*)

Female: I thought you knew how to do this. Didn't you take Driver's Ed?

Male: Yeah, but… well I skipped a lot.

Female: Me too… it was so boring.

Male: Were you wearing a seatbelt?

Female: No. I hope I'm not…

Male: You don't have any diseases… do you?

Female: Do you? (16-17)

The blanks created in this passage reside in the continuous string of analogies between driving terms and sexual health terms. The pacing of this passage is quite quick, and thus the audience members must work quickly to translate the metaphors and make sense of this scene within the context of learning about sexual health. Both the pace and the humour are additional ways in which Heather draws in her audience; when combined with the already-established metaphor of driving, this scene provides an effective way of

encouraging the teens to connect with the content and become active creators of the performance.

These blanks are not only seen when whole scenes are analysed, but are also found in the individual words and phrases which Heather chooses. For example, later on in the scene between Delphi and Marcel, they both try to express how they feel about the physical side of their relationship, but both have equal difficulty finding the proper language:

> Delphi: Yeah, well I like the stuff we're doing now. I wouldn't mind doing more stuff. But I don't necessarily want to go all the way.
>
> Marcel: I like the stuff we're doing too. I'd like to go further, but we don't have to go all the way. (12)

The vagueness of the language allows the audience to expand the scene in their minds, each creating their own definition of "stuff", "all the way", "go further", and so on. Because they must actively participate in the creation of meaning within the scene, the teen audience engages with the material more intensely, and will both retain more of the information given and accept the message more readily, since they are allowed to construct part of it themselves instead of being told exactly what to think at every moment.

Within *Are We There Yet?*, because it is intended to be directly educational, Heather does not allow the audience to just construct their own meaning and then move on. She always subtly includes some useful information after having allowed the audience to fill in the blanks on their own. This carries with it the risk of becoming pedantic and preachy, which is generally a mistake with young audiences and causes

them to immediately tune out and reject the message of the piece. However, because of Heather's unique use of participatory techniques, she avoids leaving the issue at the point of passing on information and sounding didactic, and encourages the audience to participate in developing this information. Using techniques like gathering, in which the actors onstage ask for varying levels of input from the audience, she is able to engage them a second time, this time in a more literal way, by giving them a truly active role in creating the performance. She no longer stays in the realm of figurative participation, in which blanks in the language and text allow the audience to create a more complete picture in their mind, but actually includes them in the immediate creation of character and plot. The scenes are developed onstage, right in front of the audience, which allows them to actively participate in deciding who the characters will be, how they will act and react, and what issues should be dealt with. As Heather says, "It is in the youth to youth participation, where characters genuinely need help and advice and the audience gives it to them, that the most significant blanks are filled, publicly". This concept of the participation being public, rather than private, is an important aspect of the success of participatory techniques. While Iser's theories are intended to focus on a private activity, reading, theatre is inherently performative. The fact that these teenagers are working together, rather than individually, to fill in the blanks is imperative, since it allows the teens to share both their knowledge and ignorance with each other. This group interaction and public participation is instrumental in breaking through the social barriers and engaging the teenagers; as Heather says, "It is in the action and reflection of participation that the main message is conveyed, which is: you are smart and you can have agency in your own decisions about sexuality". Thus, by encouraging this public activity, Heather

is declaring her trust in and respect for the teens, showing them rather than just telling them that she believes in their power of choice. As she said earlier, she believes that the teens know what good sexual decisions are, and this belief in them is communicated through her participatory techniques like gathering. For instance, right after the scene between Delphi and Marcel quoted above, the other actors fill in some more information and encourage the audience to add to it:

> Instructor Two: *repeat*. Okay so when you talk about not going all the way are you talking about abstinence? Okay, abstinence. Does anybody know what abstinence means? *GATHERS definitions from Audience then turns to SEXUALITY EDUCATOR for clarification.* Is there anything you'd like to add?
>
> Sexuality Educator: I really like what everyone said. You're right, abstinence means not having intercourse, but there are lots of ways to be physical and intimate that aren't intercourse. It all depends on your personal boundaries. (12)

Heather uses this as a way to encourage the audience to share the information they have, making them feel more a part of the performance and respected for their intelligence.

She also uses this gathering technique to create actual scenes. Gathering is used throughout the entire performance to help develop and shape scenes, but the most complex and extensive use of it occurs at the end of the show when the audience is given the chance to utilize the skills they have learnt throughout the performance using a technique called human clay. The audience is divided into two teams, males and females, and with the guidance of the actors, who act as coaches, each team creates their own 'clay

character'. One of the female actors becomes the female teams' clay character, and a male actor becomes the male team's character. Each team must mould this actor/clay character into their perception of a typical, real, teenager by giving the clay character specific personality traits, values, ideals, and mannerisms. They are then responsible for helping and advising their clay character throughout the rest of the sequence. The scene proceeds through several phases of a typical relationship: how to meet someone, how to arrange a first date, and how to negotiate through a significant change in the relationship. The entire scene is essentially unscripted. The actor/coaches provide structure and basic direction, and the actor/clay characters help guide the participation as well, but the majority of the decision-making is done by the teenagers. For example, at the beginning of the scene, the coaches set up the rules and the context of the scene, and then place the responsibility into the hands of the audience:

> *CLAY CHARACTERS come out, see each other, have instant attraction and call Time Out. They rush to their team to ask advice on how to approach the other. They GATHER suggestions, then go back into the scene. Using the suggestions, and with SIDE COACHING from their team, they PLAY OUT the scene until they have established some kind of communication and have introduced themselves to each other.* (31)

By creating the entire scene based on the suggestions and coaching of the audience, Heather leaves large blanks which the teens must fill in. Because the audience is publicly and actively involved in the construction of the scene, with the actors continually asking for suggestions, advice and direction, the teenagers become extremely engaged in the process and therefore the material.

This technique is used throughout the rest of the scene. With the advice and direction of the two audience teams, the characters negotiate their way through a difficult situation: the couple has had consensual, protected sex, but one of them has now reconsidered and does not want to continue having sex for the time being. By using the skills they learned earlier and by sharing their opinions and information, the teens are able to practice negotiating a complex situation. This highlights another significant aspect of using blanks to allow the teens to actively control the play. By having a neutral person onstage who the teens are encouraged to advise and control, the teens are able to safely ask questions and act out situations without having to actually risk failure, physical hurt or embarrassment in real life. As both Erik Erikson and Christine Redington show in their discussions of role play[10], this can be an extremely useful way of allowing the teens to try on different identities and giving them a third character through whom to speak. As Redington found, the identification with a role becomes "a way to learn, a way of giving the pupils a freedom to express themselves" (178). Thus, the creation of these large blanks in the text which must be filled in by the audience engages the teens in a direct way, because of their public involvement and ability to role play, so that they are often absorbed in the action and characters despite any initial reluctance or scepticism.

I encountered an anecdotal example of this when I attended a performance of *Are We There Yet?* in April 2005. Watching the class of grade nine students file in, I immediately noticed the class clown/troublemaker of the class. He was obviously popular and used to being in control of social situations, and was exhibiting much scepticism and reluctance about the play to come. In the beginning, he attempted to disrupt the performance by throwing out inappropriate comments and disparaging remarks, but the

[10] Please see pages 5-6 in Chapter One.

experienced actors quickly used these to their advantage, disarming him of his usual methods of disruption by incorporating his inappropriate suggestions or taking his comments seriously and encouraging him to defend his position. He then quickly became engaged in the show, and by the end was one of the principal participators despite his initial reluctance to accept this innovative way of learning. While anecdotal, this example is indicative of how plays like *Are We There Yet?* can appeal to teenagers because of their use of blanks. These gaps not only draw the audience members into the show, but they also show respect for the students' intelligence. Blanks help prevent the show from becoming overly didactic, while still allowing the playwright to impart a significant amount of information, and are thus an extremely useful and effective method of breaking through the teenagers' natural social constraints.

These blanks are a way of making the play dialectic, rather than didactic. As I demonstrated in my analysis of Mirrione and Pammenter's discussion of using a dialectic approach[11], this is a key element in theatre which allows the teenagers some authority and control. Adolescents respond more to dialectical theatre than to theatre that imposes a single opinion, and thus a play like *Are We There Yet?* works well with them because of its use of blanks to create openings for the teens to interject their own opinions and ideas. The element of choice, the responsibility of making their own decisions within the play, appeals to these teens who are rebellious and pushing the edges of their beliefs, questioning anything dictated to them by an authority figure. By making the play dialectic rather than didactic, Heather offers an element of control to the teenagers and thus implies a level of respect for their intelligence and ability to discern. This dialectical process opens up avenues of communication, allowing and encouraging discussion,

[11] Please see pages 28-30 in Chapter One, especially my discussion on page 29-30.

disagreement and debate; this is done especially well in *Are We There Yet?* since Heather actually allows and encourages verbal discussion and debate during the performance, rather than merely encouraging a personally internal or after-show discussion. This subtle acknowledgement of adolescents' independence and intelligence can be an extremely effective way to encourage them to open up and engage in the performance. If they begin to suspect that adults in positions of authority are being didactic, derogatory or patronizing, adolescents will often shut down immediately, refusing to engage in any participation. Thus, Heather's use of blanks within both the text and the structure of *Are We There Yet?* allow the play to transcend the social restraints inherent in an adolescent audience and encourage resonant communication between the play and its audience.

CHAPTER FOUR: IMAGE AND METAPHOR IN *THE TALE OF TEEKA*

"[The Tale of Teeka] demonstrates, if any demonstration were needed, the theatre's ability to connect with both children and adults and with their respective ways of understanding the world" (Les Deux Mondes website)

Although *The Tale of Teeka* was originally commissioned specifically for a young audience, playwright Michel Marc Bouchard also hoped to make it a play for all audiences. As he says, "I embarked upon the challenge of writing a text which would reflect my inner world, without marginalizing the work on the pretext that it was for children's theatre. I was also anxious to offer this play to audiences of all ages" (9). *The Tale of Teeka* was originally produced in 1992 by Les Deux Mondes, a theatre company in Montreal, its original French version *L'Histoire de l'oie*. It has since been presented all over North America and Europe and translated into many different languages, to exceptionally positive reviews. As Les Deux Mondes say on their website, "the show's universal theme and striking beauty give rise to a strong emotional and intellectual response from its audiences, acclaimed since its creation in 1991 in over fifteen countries around the globe". Comments include "Touching, disquieting, incisive, and also funny (...) Rarely is such a theme addressed in so intelligent and subtle a fashion", "The play and its staging were subtle, full of joy and sadness, and resonant with meaning" (Lambert) and "*The Tale of Teeka* [. . .] has transformed a fraught subject--child abuse--into a disturbing, hauntingly beautiful theater piece" (Heffley). This enthusiastic response shows that Bouchard has transcended the boundaries of theatre for young people as opposed to theatre for adults and created a piece that has a wide appeal and a universal

message. While he did not create *The Tale of Teeka* with a specifically didactic purpose in mind, Bouchard has, nonetheless, written a piece of theatre that has immense appeal and potential for communicating successfully with young people and encouraging them to discuss the issues raised in the show.

One aspect of *The Tale of Teeka* which helps contribute to its potential success with a teen audience is its use of performance space and general intended audience. *The Tale of Teeka* has not been brought specifically to schools in order to be performed for young teens the way both *Wrecked!* and *Are We There Yet?* regularly are, and yet within this difference lies its potential for connecting with a teen audience. *Wrecked!* and *Are We There Yet?* were written specifically for young teen audiences, and one of the greatest hurdles both had to overcome was the teens' scepticism and reluctance to enjoy anything that is meant to be instructive or beneficial for them. *The Tale of Teeka*, on the other hand, avoids this initial obstacle because of both its performance space and its wide intended audience.

The Tale of Teeka uses performance space in the opposite way of *Wrecked!* and *Are We There Yet?*. By bringing theatre into the schools themselves, both *Wrecked!* and *Are We There Yet?* are able to disrupt the social cohesion that usually occurs in a theatre.[12] By disrupting this group mentality, these plays are able to isolate their teen audience and perform plays specifically designed to engage their demographic. *The Tale of Teeka*, on the other hand, approaches this social constraint issue in the opposite way. Since it is usually performed in traditional theatres, where audience reactions are somewhat controlled by normative expectations,[13] *The Tale of Teeka* can break through

[12] Please see page 11 in Chapter One for a developed discussion of this phenomenon.
[13] Please see discussion of traditional versus non-traditional theatre spaces on pages 14-16 of Chapter One.

the social cohesion that occurs within teen culture. By watching a performance meant for a general audience, the teens are given a model spectator against which to base their behaviour and reaction. If a large group of teenagers is taken to the theatre, their reaction is likely to be more disrespectful, cynical and sceptical than if they are interspersed individually amongst both adult and child audience members since these adults and children constitute, as John Whitmore observes, "a sign system for both performers and other spectators to read" (56). They become a signifier for the teens to read and adjust their behaviour accordingly.[14] Thus, because Bouchard did not intend *The Tale of Teeka* to be didactic or have a primarily instructive purpose, he has inadvertently created a space in which the teens can drop their social constraints and allow themselves to be drawn into the world of the play.

Essentially, *The Tale of Teeka* is the story of a friendship between a young boy and a young goose. However, the underlying plot deals with child abuse and the cyclical nature of violence. Les Deux Mondes describe it beautifully on their website:

> *The Tale of Teeka* is a profoundly sensitive and captivating account of a day in the life of a child on a Quebec farm in the 1950's. Teeka the goose is the devoted companion and curious observer of the young Maurice, a child, we discover, who is abused by his parents and who takes refuge in a world of his own invention. *The Tale of Teeka* is a poetic exploration of the transmission of violence and casts a lingering gaze at what memory secretly retains of that violence.

Narrated by an adult Maurice, who also often plays the part of Teeka, *The Tale of Teeka* addresses a sensitive and disturbing issue in a gentle, often humorous, yet discomforting manner through its poetic dialogue, images and metaphors. Bouchard deals with an issue

[14] Please refer to page 13 of Chapter One for more discussion on this topic.

that is often hidden away from children and teenagers and glossed over for their well-intended protection from the horrifying reality of abuse. However, as Bouchard states in the opening line of the play, "There are stories we are told only when we're young, there are others we are told as adults … Most of the stories we are told as adults should be told to us when we are children … The story I'm going to tell you is the kind of story I should have been told when I was young" (15).

The main power behind *The Tale of Teeka*'s ability to communicate a strong message comes from its basic allegorical form. As Angus Fletcher simply defines it, an allegory says "one thing in order to mean something beyond that one thing" (4). Edgar V. Roberts describes allegory as "a complete and self-sufficient narrative, but it also signifies another series of events or conditions" (142), relating to Fletcher's point that allegory does not necessarily have to be read on several different levels; often, the literal story is complete and easily understood all by itself. However, as Fletcher points out, while the story can "get along without interpretation, it becomes much richer and more interesting if given interpretation" (7). It is in this interpretative state, then, that the power of *The Tale of Teeka* lies. The reader's ability to make sense of the underlying meaning is what engages them in the story. As Maureen Quilligan describes the experience of reading allegory, "the reader's participation in the fiction must be active and self-conscious, and it will ultimately take the form of gradual self-discovery" (226). In *The Tale of Teeka*, Bouchard uses a doubled personification allegory to engage his audience. On the one hand, he uses the agents of Maurice and Teeka to represent abstract ideas, and on the other, he imbues Teeka, an animal, with anthropomorphic qualities.

By exploring this allegory through both extended metaphor and visual imagery, Bouchard is able to suggest many levels of meaning at once, and as such offers great potential to the director, actors and designers to create meaning in a more extensive way than just text could allow. David Ball describes how image and metaphor can allow a playwright to say much more in a moment than text could describe in an hour:

> "She walked like a sparrow beside her elephant of a husband". Without images, I would need pages to communicate everything that sentence contains. An image is something we already know or can easily be told that is used to describe, illuminate, or expand upon something we don't know or cannot easily be told. (69)

Martin Esslin elaborates on this point by saying that because images are complex and intricate, they can relay more complicated concepts that cannot be verbalized and communicate many ideas all at once.[15] Bouchard incorporates both a strong, central, extended metaphor about the cyclical nature of violence as well as many instances of potential visual imagery for the director and actors to exploit and explore. In doing so, he opens up many possibilities for communication with an audience.

Bouchard's extended metaphor raises the issue of violence and how it can be passed down through generations. By so doing, he creates additional levels of meaning through the metaphor that stretch beyond the immediately apparent physical child abuse. Because he uses a metaphor to impart the idea that those who have violence inflicted upon them will in turn inflict violence upon others, he is passing the responsibility of decoding this message onto the audience and thus engaging them in the work more so than any literal verbalization of this concept could. Counsell, Iser, Ubserfeld and

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[15] See page 34 of Chapter One.

Lauwers, all in their own way, refer to this power that lies behind allowing the audience to have agency over decoding the meaning in an image or metaphor.[16] Bouchard never explicitly states his message about the cyclical nature of violence; he trusts that the audience will interpret this idea from the images and relationships developed onstage, and encourages them to make connections between previously disparate objects or ideas. As Csordas puts it, Bouchard is creating a series of "intentional threads that trace the connections between ourselves and our worlds [. . .] all meant to convey a sense of existential meaning beyond representational meaning" (147).[17]

We see the first subtle implication of this extended metaphor about violence in the very first scene when Maurice the Adult is reflecting on Maurice the Child's encounter with the storm:

> MAURICE (CHILD) *(sombre and threatening)* I want the wind to bring you here.
>
> MAURICE (ADULT) That voice was the voice he used when he set ants on fire in a cardboard box, the voice he used when he tore the wings off butterflies. (16)

This reference to actions which could be considered normal boyish behaviour instead sets up the context for the metaphor about the cyclical nature of violence, a connection that will be continually expressed during the rest of the play through the relationship between Maurice and Teeka, the goose. When Maurice first attempts to become friends with Teeka, he acts towards her in the only way he has ever known: through a violent act. As Teeka says, "Maurice came back for the third day in a row. It was his turn to frighten me. As I was allowing him to pat my neck, he began to tear out some feathers. I am not an

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[16] Please refer to pages 32-3 in Chapter One for a more developed discussion of this topic.
[17] Please refer to page 37-8 in Chapter One for the development of this idea.

ant, not a butterfly… I bit him … This is how we tamed our solitudes" (23). With this, Bouchard is encouraging the audience to make the connection between the violence inflicted on Maurice and the violence he inflicts on Teeka. However, Teeka seems innately aware of this repetitive nature of violence, and is able to stop it with another violent act. As she implies in her last line, this brings the two of them to an equilibrium within which they are temporarily excluded from the pattern of violence that exists in Maurice's life. Teeka says,

> It was one of the most beautiful moments in my life. There were earthworms lying on the ground everywhere, I was eating new cake and Maurice was patting my neck without pulling out a single feather.
>
> MAURICE (CHILD) *(singing unenthusiastically)* "Oh happy times. We're all just fine. Oh happy times." (27)

By including the stage direction "singing unenthusiastically", Bouchard gives the director and actor a way to impart a clue as to where this peaceful lull in the violent cycle may lead.

Throughout the play, Bouchard includes expressions of hope that this cycle of violence might be broken by Maurice. As Teeka says when Maurice hides from his parents, "I would have loved to see him act courageous, like when he faced the storm and challenged Bulamutumumo" (33). Maurice does attempt to rebel against his parents when he purposefully makes himself dirty by splashing in the mud with Teeka. However, this rebellious act will be revealed as the catalyst for the continuation of the repetitive nature of violence that concludes the play, implying that there is little hope for escape from this pattern. After getting dirty, Maurice goes into the house to clean up, taking Teeka with

him. We can see hope even in Maurice that he may be able to break the cycle when he sings in the bathtub, this time more enthusiastically than the first (38). This blissful moment lasts for a while, as Teeka and Maurice embark on an imaginative journey in Maurice's dream world of Tarzan and his jungle animals. However, Bouchard brings back the extended metaphor of violence when Maurice pretends to be attacked by a lion and insists on Teeka saving him. There are several layers to this part of the development of the metaphor. First of all, we see that the only pattern Maurice understands is violence, as he insists on Teeka hurting him in order to save him; this paradox will be repeated later on, but in a more serious way. At this point, though, we see Teeka's repulsion at the thought of harming Maurice:

> MAURICE (CHILD) Hurry, Teeka! The lion is about to sink his long teeth into my arm!
>
> TEEKA I dove down to rescue him.
>
> MAURICE (CHILD) Look at your feet, Teeka. You're growing talons as sharp as knifes.
>
> TEEKA Terrified, I stared at the long hooks that were growing at the end of my webbed feet.
>
> MAURICE (CHILD) Sink them into my skin, dig them into my flesh and carry me away! (49-50)

Maurice knows only one way to counter violence, and that is with violence. He insists on Teeka harming him in order to rescue him from his plight. On another level, we see Maurice transformed into a disturbing parallel of his parents. The language and phrases

he uses to convince Teeka become a horrifying parroting of what has obviously been said to him in the past:

MAURICE (CHILD) Obey me!

TEEKA *(confused)* I was so happy to play with Tarzan, to discover his jungle, I was happy to fly …

MAURICE (CHILD) Will you listen to me when I speak to you?

TEEKA Was I to pay for this happiness by torturing him?

MAURICE (CHILD) I'm going to take out the strap! Sink your hooks into my back!

TEEKA I couldn't bring myself to do it.

MAURICE (CHILD) You know what you're going to get if you don't do as I say! (50-1)

The notion that a child learns from what he observes and will unconsciously imitate what is done to him is exemplified in this passage. However, Bouchard never clearly says that this is his intent, nor do we ever hear the parents actually use these words; he leaves it up to the audience to draw the connections between Maurice's words and what may have been said to him in the past.

This disturbing sequence is brought to a climatic end by the closure of the violence cycle:

TEEKA I longed to stop flying but there seemed to be no end to the labyrinth of this nightmare. It was as if someone else was talking through him…

MAURICE (CHILD) I said "now!"

TEEKA The more he yelled at me, the longer my talons grew!

MAURICE (CHILD) Right now!

TEEKA No!

MAURICE (CHILD) I'll never play with you again! Never, ever again! *(He beats the pillow with the leather strap so hard a cloud of feathers rises into the air).* (51-2)

As Maurice expresses the violence inherent inside him, the idyllic jungle scene evaporates and both characters are transported back to real life. Teeka's words in this passage are eerily prophetic, but in such a subtle way that audience members must be perceptive and engaged in order to make the connections. When Teeka says "I longed to stop flying but there seemed to be no end to the labyrinth of this nightmare", she is not only referring to the immediate situation at hand but also to the maze of violence through which Maurice must continually live his life. Then, her line "The more he yelled at me, the longer my talons grew!" could easily be literally rewritten as "the more violence is inflicted upon us, the more we develop the ability to inflict violence upon others". However, because Bouchard stops short of explicitly explaining this extended metaphor for the audience, he leaves a large gap in the creation of meaning which only the audience can fill in. As I have shown through Iser's theories,[18] by leaving a blank in the information given, as Bouchard has done through his use of an extended metaphor that traverses the entire play, a playwright can compel the audience to fill in this information, thus engaging them in this interactive process and drawing them into the performance.

Bouchard makes a strong comment about the nature of this cycle of violence in the conclusion of this extended metaphor. After Teeka realizes the truth of her existence by witnessing the bursting of the feather pillow (an image which I will explore in-depth

[18] See page 69 in Chapter Three.

later on), Maurice says, upset, ""That's how it is, Teeka. That's the way things are and there's nothing we can do about it. Nothing!" (53). Maurice expresses his recognition that this cycle is doomed to repeat through his life and that he cannot escape it. He lives out this recognition at the end of the play when Teeka suggests escape:

> TEEKA Let's escape together! Escape far from your house, far from the barn, far from the jungle! Far, far away!
>
> MAURICE (CHILD) I can't help it, Teeka. That's the way things are.
>
> *He grabs the goose's neck and breaks it.*
>
> MAURICE (CHILD) Afterwards … after … If they've really hurt me … I'll get my Tarzan costume. (56-7)

Rather than offer the audience the expected reassuring message that this cycle can be broken and that children can be saved, Bouchard instead suggests the disturbing yet realistic notion that Maurice cannot escape from his past. He reasserts this message when the adult Maurice says, "The storm still rages at the centre of my being. I hope some day this fury will give way to calm" (57). This is as explicit as Bouchard ever gets: he suggests that this physical and emotional violence inflicted on Maurice as a child has had life-long repercussions, and that Maurice has had to continuously struggle to not repeat this cycle. By using this extended metaphor rather than a literal discussion to explore this disturbing issue, Bouchard is able to, as Csordas describes it, "address familiar topics – healing, emotion, gender, or power – from a different standpoint" (147).[19]

In addition to this omnipresent extended metaphor, Bouchard also includes an abundance of specific visual imagery within the text. By including so many images, he gives the director and actors the potential to create meaning in more extended ways than

[19] Please see page 38 of Chapter One for the entire quote and discussion.

pure text can allow. As Esslin says, an image on the stage can carry a "deeper, or higher, or more recondite charge of significance than the sign or object or image in question could ordinarily carry" (2). Through this use of images, Bouchard is able to insinuate, rather than explicitly state, and is therefore able communicate about issues and ideas that might otherwise be too disturbing or controversial to address.[20] Bouchard creates these images in two ways: through visual images evoked by the text and through images described by the stage directions. These two different methods work in slightly different ways. The visual images that are textually described allow, first of all, the audience to expand on and fill in the connections implied, and thus create their own meaning for themselves. Secondly, they offer the director and actors the opportunity to visually express these images. Through this double layer of interpretation, Bouchard is able to engage his audience on several simultaneous levels: they are given the opportunity to hear the poetic images evoked by the text and see them expressed visually at the same time. This leads to a greater impact and a greater possibility for communication. The other method of describing images through the stage directions offers an incredible potential to the director and designers to interpret these descriptions and visually translate them into stage images to which the audience would not otherwise have access. Essentially, in accordance with Iser's theories[21], Bouchard is not only leaving gaps for the audience, but also including blanks in his play script for the director, actors and designers to fill in. They are not literal blanks in the text, as Iser originally analyses, but nonetheless have the same effect of compelling and challenging the other artists to close the gaps. This offers the director, actors and designers the opportunity to show truths and

[20] Please see page 33-4 of Chapter One for a more in-depth discussion of this phenomenon.
[21] Please refer to my analysis of Iser's theories on pages 67-9 of Chapter Three.

ideas that cannot be expressed in literal language. In the closing of the text-based gaps through the use of images, the artists are then creating new blanks within the visual images for the audience to fill in.

There are several examples of the first type of image that are moving and powerful. First of all, by using visual images within the text, Bouchard is able to avoid modelling literal violence. Using metaphorical images instead has a very different impact on the audience than a graphic depiction of a parent beating a child would. Bouchard uses visual images within the text to subtly yet powerfully raise the issue of child abuse. The first one we encounter is the storm. Bouchard's description of it is filled with poetic language and imagery, and this vivid evocation of an overpowering and wild event becomes profoundly disturbing as it is turned against Maurice himself:

> MAURICE (ADULT): Lightning struck not far from the house. Maurice felt that he had been obeyed. Suddenly, he heard the voice begging him to come down from the roof. Frightened, he obeyed that voice. *(MAURICE (CHILD) climbs down from the roof and disappears behind the house.)* Only then did lightning strike, several times, on his head, his body and most of all his arms! For a fraction of a second, Maurice thought it was the thunderstorm … *(beat)* It was not the thunderstorm. (20-21)

This sudden, yet subtle, suggestion of physical abuse is far more arresting and disturbing than something graphic and literal could be; because of the mere suggestiveness of the passage, the audience is left to construct the visual picture of the situation themselves, engaging them more and thus making the message more powerful. By using imagery

rather than literal description, Bouchard employs Redington's short-hand[22] in order to bring up a very delicate and disturbing subject. Because of the gaps in information involved in describing a metaphor like this, Bouchard is also unconsciously using Iser's theory of blanks to engage and stimulate his audience. In addition, he has provided another type of blank for the director, actors and designers to fill in, offering the potential to incorporate a visually powerful staging of this incident.

Bouchard also uses several metaphors for the abuse that resound in their childish simplicity and painfully innocent attempt to rationalize and downplay the situation. First of all, when Teeka asks Maurice what happened to his arm, he replies, "It's nothing serious, Teeka. My arm is taking a nap" (24). He then attempts to look on the bright side by saying "(*unenthusiastically*) He gave me his brand new cap! [. . .] He said they were going to get me a real Tarzan costume. Soon." (25). Later on, Maurice once again brushes aside Teeka's concerns with yet another metaphor describing how he got injured:

> TEEKA: (*She notices the many bruises on MAURICE's body.*) Why was Bulamutumumo so hard on Maurice's body? Why didn't his arm wake up?
>
> MAURICE (CHILD): (*Embarrassed to see TEEKA looking at him.*) It's nothing serious Teeka. It's just because … because…
>
> TEEKA: Once again, he did not finish his sentence.
>
> MAURICE (CHILD): They're just injuries I got in the jungle fighting with Numa, the lion… Come for a swim… (37)

Maurice's resilient attitude affects the audience because of the many layers of meaning invoked by Maurice's words. First of all, Maurice's assertion that his arm is merely

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[22] See page 31 of Chapter One.

taking a nap suggests first that he is ashamed of his injury and ashamed of how he received it. Then, his seemingly innocent description of his new clothes, and the further prospect of a Tarzan costume, resounds with the implications of his parents' cycle of abuse and apology. The suggestion that the severity of abuse is directly related to the desirability of the present given after sends a chilling message about the abuse to come; if a broken arm leads to a new hat, what level of abuse will warrant a full Tarzan costume? Also, Maurice's later reference to his injuries as resulting from fighting with Numa implies that he tries to avoid recognizing his situation by escaping into a dream world. Because of Bouchard's use of suggestive imagery, he does not need to explicitly state these concepts and thus lends them greater power.

These examples of Bouchard's use of textual images show how powerfully they can raise disturbing topics. His other method of incorporating images into the show, writing them into the stage directions, also proves to be a highly effective way of illustrating disturbing concepts. For instance, at the end of the climatic sequence between Teeka and Maurice in the jungle, Bouchard writes the following image into the script:

> MAURICE (CHILD) I'll never play with you again! Never, ever again!
>
> *He beats the pillow with a leather strap so hard a cloud of feathers rises into the air.*
>
> TEEKA We both stood still, appalled … in the midst of a shower of feathers … (52)

This one line, evoking the image of Maurice beating the pillow with the strap, contains the potential to reveal many layers of meaning. As Esslin says, an image can suggest "a meaning more charged with emotion or insight than the primary significance could

accommodate and by which the mundane, prosaic word or object or image becomes transmuted into something poetic and sublime" (2). Thus, Bouchard turns an ordinary pillow into an object of great and varied significance. On one level, it can refer to Teeka herself, since the pillow is filled with goose feathers; in this way, the pillow becomes an image of Maurice beating Teeka, and depicts him passing on the violence that has been inflicted upon him. On another level, Maurice's beating of the pillow evokes the parallel image of his parents using the leather strap on him, and as I said above, is a way of modeling violence without a literal, graphic depiction of it. On a third level of meaning, this is the moment when Teeka discovers the truth of her reality. Her most trusted friend has betrayed her; as she says, "this pillow was the ultimate destination, from the pen to the barn. And perhaps my only friend slept every night, with his head resting on my mother's down [. . .] Maurice knew, yet did nothing to save me from this cruel fate" (53). Teeka has moved from innocence to experience in this moment, and in the end, she cannot live with the knowledge of this horrifying reality.

Bouchard employs another image in the stage directions that extends this metaphor of Teeka's loss of innocence. As Teeka is attempting to escape after discovering this truth, she encounters a mirror:

> TEEKA All of a sudden, I found myself standing face to face with another goose. I felt relieved. "Tell me the way out." She was making the same gesture I was. "Tell me the way out." The nightmare continued. "Tell me the way out." I wanted to follow her, but her image shattered into a thousand pieces.
>
> *We hear the sound of a mirror shattering.* (54-5)

This visual representation of Teeka's situation and mental state enhances and elevates her devastation and confusion. This one image is able to encapsulate the entire expression of her emotional state and the implications that her discovery has had; as Esslin describes, the capacity of images to portray greater complexity "allows more profound insights to be communicated in areas of human experience that are multilayered, delicate and beyond the reach of discursive speech" (2). Both the image of the pillow being beaten and the mirror shattering embody this concept; as David Ball asserts, an image can contain in one moment an idea that would take pages and pages of literal description to communicate, and can also encompass the ambiguity and subjectivity allowed in an image that is often lost in literal language (69).

Another extensive stage direction that allows for great creativity and image-making on the part of the director is the moment when Maurice's room is transformed into a jungle:

> *He opens the book and the animals come to life. The leaves and the trees printed on the bedspread rise and begin to sway in the wind that enters through the window. Vines fall from the ceiling... The walls of the room fade and are replaced by mountains and valleys and cliffs.* (45)

This suggestive and open-ended description leaves a large blank for the director to fill in. It offers great potential to directors, designers and actors for a visually stunning and meaningful transformation of an ordinary space onstage. All of these images reveal that Bouchard understands the concept implied by Csordas in his exploration of the possibility of embodied experience. As I concluded earlier, by giving power over to the possibility embedded in an image, rather than focussing only on the text, Bouchard is able to access

a whole realm of suggestion, emotion and subjectivity denied us by text alone.[23] This gives *The Tale of Teeka* the power to communicate successfully with an audience, and thus could be remarkably effective at breaking through the social barriers of teen culture and engaging them in this production. Because of its use of metaphor and imagery, which can provide a valuable short-hand to the playwright for communication with his audience, *The Tale of Teeka* gives its audience the freedom to interpret and connote meaning because of the blanks created within the text by the implication of visual imagery. This communicates to a teen audience that the playwright respects them and trusts their intelligence.[24] Combined with imagery and metaphor's tendency towards complexity, with its ability to contain several levels of meaning and therefore imply greater significance than its primary, obvious meaning, the use of images and metaphor can therefore provide a profound and valuable method of examining difficult subjects and discussing sensitive issues with adolescents.

Throughout my analysis of *The Tale of Teeka*, I have suggested that through its basic allegorical form and use of imagery and metaphor, the play employs many of the techniques I had previously shown to be successful in engaging a teen audience. These include the use of traditional versus non-traditional performance spaces and general audiences, a resistance to being didactic, the encouragement of participation through the use of blanks and gaps in information and the use of compelling ways to invite identification between the audience and the characters onstage. However, not only does the use of image and metaphor offer a way to make use of all the above techniques, it also offers many additional benefits, such as extended significance, several levels of

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[23] Please refer to my discussion on phenomenology on page 38 in Chapter One.
[24] Please refer to my discussion on pages 29-30 of Chapter One and pages 79-80 of Chapter Three.

meaning and subtle methods for depicting violent and disturbing acts, when used with either a general audience or a specifically youth-oriented one.

CONCLUSION

"Drama [. . .] along with poetry and other arts is not a frill .... It is through creative arts, including the arts of language, that young people can be helped to come to terms with themselves, more surely than by any other route" (quoted in Pammenter 57)

As Pammenter asserts, the arts are more than just an extracurricular activity, more than just an option. As I have shown throughout my analysis of *Wrecked!*, *Are We There Yet?* and *The Tale of Teeka*, theatre can offer a unique and vibrant way with which to communicate with young people. Because of the varied methods that can be used to foster dialogue about and an exploration of sensitive topics, theatre can open up avenues of discussion that normally remain closed or restricted for teenagers and their parents, teachers and other authority figures. Theatre is able to achieve this candidness through both its innate nature and the use of innovative techniques. In *Wrecked!*, Chris Craddock employs various levels of identification in order to engage his audience and convince them to accept and interact with the performance. Through a shared socio-cultural background, a focus on the real issues of concern, language and character, he is able to speak frankly with the teenagers about substance abuse and communicate in a more heartfelt and honest way than is often possible. Similarly, in *Are We There Yet?*, playwright Jane Heather uses participatory techniques to engage her audience. These participatory techniques rely on the use of blanks, as defined by Wolfgang Iser, which the audience must then fill in. This gives the teenage audience both a sense of agency and responsibility; by interpellating them in the performance, these techniques encourage them to become active co-creators of the play. In Michel Marc Bouchard's *The Tale of*

Teeka, his extensive use of image and metaphor offers the opportunity to engage a teenage audience. Since the audience must use their imagination to interpret the images and make relevant connections within the metaphors, there is great potential to compel a teenage audience to participate in and engage with the play. In addition, the subtle and complex way in which image and metaphor can raise and explore sensitive and disturbing ideas and issues offers an extremely useful tool for communicating with teens.

However, despite the benefits of using image and metaphor to engage an audience and discuss difficult topics, plays like *The Tale of Teeka* have rarely been written and performed in English Canada for a teenage audience. Playwrights make great use of image and metaphor when writing for children, and revert back to it again when writing poetic work for adults, but this exciting and valuable way of communicating with adolescents is largely ignored when the target audience is teenagers. My analysis of *Wrecked!* and *Are We There Yet?* demonstrates that both identification and the use of blanks can work extremely well in breaking through the social barriers that exist especially in teen culture and, as a result, engage the teens in a meaningful performance. Through my examination of *The Tale of Teeka*, I have shown that the use of images and metaphor also employs aspects of identification and the leaving of blanks. If *The Tale of Teeka* and other plays which use imagery are therefore able to offer playwrights a method of communicating with a teen audience that employs at once the techniques proven to be successful in other work as well as the added benefits of subtlety, complexity and agency, the question must be asked: why are English Canadian playwrights largely ignoring such a useful and valuable tool? While financial and technical concerns will obviously be somewhat obstructive to a play which wishes to use extensive scenographic elements and

elaborate lighting effects, *The Tale of Teeka* allows most of its images and metaphors to be created and expressed through the simple use of various types of puppets – easily transportable – and a simple set. Thus, there seem to be few barriers to the production of this sort of play, and yet it is so rarely done. It is my hope that this analysis of the ways in which playwrights (and by extension, directors and actors) can transcend the social constraints of teen culture and engage them in a performance will offer theatre practitioners from all areas some insight and guidance into how adolescents respond to and perceive theatre and thus inform future development of theatre for adolescents.

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